

1979–1988: Coping with diversity



Of geographical, vocational,
and technical change

AOCS membership had risen almost 25% during the previous decade to approximately 3,800 members in 1979. The AOCS had held its first three world conferences—one on edible fats and oils, one on soaps and detergents, one on vegetable food proteins—nine more would follow during the next ten years. More than 1,000 persons were attending annual meetings. Coping with growth and diversity had become AOCS' major challenge.

"They turned the 'American Oil Chemists' Society' into the 'AOCS'—in other words, from a North American to a global organization."

A former AOCS president was talking about the significance of AOCS' three world conferences during the 1970s.

The Society would continue to travel the world between 1979 and 1988 to hold international conferences in Canada, France, Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Singapore, and Switzerland, plus two others in the United States. AOCS also hosted the International Society for Fat Science meeting in conjunction with the 1980 AOCS annual meeting in New York City.

The number of members from outside the United States soared, rising from approximately 600 in 1976 to about 1,500 in 1988—more than a third of AOCS' 4,082 members.

FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT

AOCS elected its first female president, Joyce Beare-Rogers of Health and Welfare Canada, in 1985.

Beare-Rogers said some members in the mid-1980s were urging the society to change its name, lest the word "American" deter potential members in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere from joining. In 1984 special committees were formed to discuss the idea.

"A year later when I became president—the first Canadian—the time seemed right to stress how the acronym 'AOCS' had become internationally entrenched and should remain unchanged," she recalled. Beare-Rogers' support for the AOCS name prevailed, and the society began to identify itself simply as AOCS, rather than using the full four-word name. (The idea of a name change would arise again in the 1990s, but the outcome would remain the same.)

"In 1984 when I was vice-president, a major concern for me was pulling together a nutrition interest group to encourage the submission of papers and discussions at meetings," she recalled. Beare-Rogers said her nutrition interest group evolved into today's Health and Nutrition Division.



Joyce Beare-Rogers, AOCS' first female president. For a full list of this decade's timeline, AOCS meeting locations, sources for further reading, and other historical sidebars, log in and visit www.aocs.org/press/inform/.

Beare-Rogers also was a key link in the creation of the AOCS Canadian Section. As Canadian government support for meetings of its expert committee on fats and oils and other lipids was fading, Beare-Rogers collected signatures in 1985 to form the AOCS Canadian Section. The Canadian Section became AOCS' sixth geographic section. The Desert Southwest, Southwest, and Mid-America sections also were approved in 1985.

AOCS' first specialty section (since the 1928 creation of a soap "section") was a protein and co-products section, inaugurated under the leadership of Ed Lusas of Texas A&M University. The section's first luncheon meeting occurred during the 1982

Toronto annual meeting. The Protein and Co-products Division was followed by the Surfactant and Detergent Division in 1987, with Ted Matson and Arno Cahn, two key figures in the 1977 World Conference on Soaps and Detergents, championing that group.

Two more sections (Latin American, and Plant and Microbial Lipids) would be approved in 1989.

COPING WITH CHANGE

Executive Director Jim Lyon's challenges included finding ways to accommodate the increasing workload created by AOCS members' increasing geographic and vocational diversity.

By the early 1980s, AOCS was running out of office and storage space at the Champaign building. The "new" headquarters had opened in 1971 with a staff of 11 full-time and two part-time staff members. By 1980, the staff numbered 20. At one point, portable partitions were used to divide a small circular library into two not-very-private offices frequently trespassed by staffers headed for the coffee pot in an adjacent kitchenette.

At its 1980 spring meeting, the Governing Board discussed the possible sale of the building lease to help finance a move to larger quarters. Six years later in the summer of 1986, the University of Illinois offered to buy out AOCS' lease for \$450,000 if AOCS could move quickly (the payment would decrease each month the move was delayed beyond August). The university otherwise would have had to wait to acquire the property until about 2035 when the lease would expire.

Why the rush? Nick Pelick, AOCS president at the time, said he was told the university was in "dire need of space" and thus sought quick access. AOCS moved in August 1986 to rented offices at 41 East University Avenue in downtown Champaign. Within 12 months, the staff moved again, into a newly constructed headquarters building at 1608 West Broadmoor Drive in southwest Champaign.

A fundraising campaign to build the "Best Little Oil House on the Prairie" yielded approximately \$320,000. A mortgage of about \$50,000 was needed to complete financing for the building project, which totaled less than a million dollars. Within five years, the mortgage had been retired and the number of staff members had grown to the mid-30s.

ANALYTICAL VERIFICATION

In the early 1980s, major oilseed processing firms said they were receiving suspect analyses of soybean meal samples sent to AOCS Referee Chemists. At one point, Cargill sent a meal sample with an intentionally inaccurate analysis printed on its label to an AOCS-certified independent laboratory. The lab's report "confirmed" the analysis as shown on the label.

Trade association rules specified use of AOCS methods as applied by AOCS certified laboratories. The trade groups pointed out that the value of a shipload of soybeans could change by many thousands of dollars if a protein analysis report varied by a fraction of one percent.

In 1985 AOCS agreed, with financial support from the National Soybean Processors Association (now the National Oilseed Processors Association), to send blind check samples of soybean meal to selected participants in AOCS' certified laboratory program. The new system provided for warnings before a laboratory was decertified. Since 1985, few laboratories have lost certification. Decertified laboratories later may re-apply to regain certification.

In 1920, AOCS had become the first organization to designate top performing independent analysts as "referee chemists," basically certifying that they were qualified to do arbitration analyses when a trade dispute occurred. In 1985, AOCS changed the term to "approved chemists," which Lyon said was a more accurate term to describe how the AOCS program operated. Various trade organizations use results of the AOCS Smalley Program, now known as the Laboratory Proficiency Program, to specify which chemists and laboratories will be eligible to do arbitration analyses under each organization's trading rules.

DECADE MILESTONES

A.R. (Dick) Baldwin retired as head of AOCS' publications committee in the mid-1980s. "Mr. AOCS" had been, for nearly 40 years, a key figure in AOCS' growth and improvement. He had served as editor of the *Journal of the American Oil Chemists' Society*, as founding editor for *Lipids*, and started the monograph program.

■ AOCS celebrated its 75th year during the 1984 annual meeting in Dallas. The festivities included a multimedia presentation during the opening breakfast, as well as historical displays in the registration area.

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"They don't look like fat people"

A Cincinnati, Ohio, helicopter reporter told his audience early Friday morning, May 5, 1989, that traffic lanes would be closed a bit longer on some downtown Cincinnati streets for a Fat Peoples' Fun Run, then added, "but they don't look fat to me."

Several dozen persons participated in the event, which was won by Stephen Behr of Ross Laboratories in Columbus, Ohio. Alice Hudson of Surface Chemicals in Riviera Beach, Florida led the female finishers.

The first fun run was held during the 1985 meeting in Philadelphia. Iowa State University's Pamela White completed the 5K course in 23:57 to be the first woman finisher. Eight years later, White was elected AOCS president. At that first fun run or walk, she was about six minutes behind Ed Hunter of Procter & Gamble who was the overall winner in 18:03. White and Hunter were the runners-up at the 1989 event.

In 1990, University of Illinois graduate student Karen Dotson was the first female finisher. She became an *INFORM* news writer in 1991 and finished second in the race that year. AOCS member Joe Fioriti had championed the idea of a fun run during the annual meeting. Fioriti had taken up running on his doctor's advice. Seventy-four joggers were at the starting line for the 1985 inaugural race. The annual meeting run was held for several years, but was discontinued after the number of participants declined to where income did not cover costs.

■ A few years later, J. Patrick Graham retired. He had been AOCS director of advertising and marketing since 1976, handling advertising and exhibit sales as well as membership and meeting promotion. Exhibit income rose sevenfold during his tenure, while meeting attendance doubled.

■ As AOCS began holding more meetings, conferences, and short courses, education was becoming increasingly important to AOCS. In 1982, Joan Dixon, who previously had been manager for meeting exhibits, was named "meetings coordinator." Six years later, in April 1988, Jean Bremer was hired as AOCS' first education director. Fourteen years later, she would become Lyon's successor. Two things would have changed by 2002: her name had changed to Jean Wills and the top staff position title had become "executive vice president."

■ Since 1919, AOCS had been presenting silver-plated loving cups to the most proficient analysts in the annual Smalley and Doughtie competitions. The cups would be inscribed with the name of each year's winner and when an analyst had won a cup three times that cup became his property and was replaced by a new cup. In 1980, both cups were about to be retired. The Smalley committee recommended AOCS find another type of award. Top analysts now receive plaques.

■ There were two major changes in AOCS' Award program during the decade. Applied Science Laboratories gave up sponsorship of the Award in Lipid Chemistry in 1981, but Supelco, a supplier of analytical materials headed by Nick Pelick, became the new sponsor of what was renamed the Supelco-AOCS Research Award, now known as the Pelick/Supelco-AOCS Research Award. The AOCS Bond Award was discontinued after 1979. Begun in 1959 as an incentive to improve technical presentations at the annual meeting, the award was discontinued and no award presented

in 1980. The number of technical talks was increasing greatly and it was difficult to find a feasible system to designate one paper as the best. The Bond Award therefore was replaced during the decades by the current system of presenting certificates for all "outstanding" presentations during the annual meeting.

GOVERNING BOARD DIVERSITY

In 1987, Lyon proposed what AOCS President Bob Hastert termed a "radical restructuring and expansion" of the Governing Board. Since 1948, when AOCS had about 1,700 members, the Governing Board had consisted of the four elected officers, the immediate four past presidents, and three members-at-large. But 40 years later, with an increasingly diverse membership totaling upwards of 4,000, there was a need to bring a wider array of voices to the table.

Lyon recommended increasing the number of at-large Governing Board members to six from three and having each member-at-large serve as vice-chairman of one of seven newly created coordinating committees (since renamed "steering" committees). Each such committee would oversee working committees in specific areas (i.e., publications, technical, education, etc.). Each coordinating committee chairperson would have a seat at the Governing Board table, but not a formal vote. The immediate past president would continue to be a board member.

The Governing Board members "immediately grasped Lyon's proposal as significant and brilliant," Hastert recalls, noting the changes "responded to the need to get more of our increasing membership, both foreign and domestic, and from an expanding vocational base, into decision-making positions at the management level of the society." The change took effect in 1988.

THE COMING DECADE

The addition of 900 members from outside the United States since 1979 had been offset by a decline of about 400 to 500 in US members. Consolidation in US oilseed processing, food processing, and personal care product industries was eroding domestic membership totals.

AOCS had been adding staff for more programs to serve a membership that was increasingly diverse both geographically and in terms of interests. AOCS had moved into a new building and paid off the mortgage quickly. But in the fall of 1988, after three consecutive years of losses in operating budgets, the Governing Board ordered cutbacks. All part-time employees and one full-time employee were laid off. For the first time since 1948, limits were placed on the number of pages to be published in AOCS technical journals.

As its seventh decade ended, AOCS had a new home, a new governing system, and several new geographical sections. For AOCS the 1990s would be good times: AOCS membership would peak, financial surpluses would return, and international activities would continue to increase.

George Willhite, who is preparing this series of articles as AOCS' centennial historian, retired from AOCS in 2002 after 27 years as a member of its publications staff. He is an honorary member of AOCS. He can be contacted via e-mail at: willhite@aocs.org.

Next month: "Laissez les bon temps roulez"