

The Tenth Anniversary of the Optical Society of America  
National Capital Section

by

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(Address given at the Anniversary Meeting, May 17, 1972,  
Georgetown University)

I have been asked to give an account of how the Section began. Since the first President, Dr. Richard Tousey is in Madrid the honor of speaking at our tenth anniversary has devolved on me. I promise to be brief. We have a crowded and interesting program and we want to get to the main speaker of the day. We folks in this outfit have a tendency to be long-winded. When I started with the pulpit some 25 years ago I was given a tip: Be bright, be brief, be gone; if you cannot strike oil in ten minutes stop boring. A scientist talking history cannot be bright; he can be brief.

A problem about my view of how all this began is that it is too restrictive. If in optics you cannot view  $2\pi$  steradian through a collimator tube, neither can history be viewed through the narrow mind and eye of one man. In retrospect it might all sound as pointless as the man who said he did not like Shakespeare's Hamlet because, as he said, it was so full of quotations.

When this Section of the Optical Society began there were already 9 other Sections, so we were not the first. Nor are we the last; now there are twenty. In 1946 there was only one - that of Rochester, New York. Washington metropolitan area has a large concentration of optical scientists and the Headquarters of the Optical Society of America had come down to Washington. In 1960 and 1961, a few interested persons talked about a local Section. The first meeting of minds and of men, apart from telephone calls, was at the old OSA office in the Chemical Society Building on December 14, 1961. There were several of us present. Fred Paul was the convenor.

He is the type of man who can be in far away places and yet be in the center of things. At that time he was somewhere on the banks of Middle River; now too he is on the back of beyond, Kent Island across the big span of Bay Bridge. He made it to few of our evening meetings, but made sure that the gleam in his eye grew to a bright big reality. He deserves a big hand for what he did. Of course there were others too at that meeting, who all worked hard, Archie Mahan, Martin Koomen, Sanderson, Madden, Mary Warga and others. We decided to form a steering committee - Paul, Madden, Mahan, Irvine Gardner and myself; and to hold a meeting on January 17, 1962 - a show of interest meeting; we divided up jobs to make sure that interest will be shown. There was optimism with caution. It was optimism which made us mail out 325 notices; and caution took over when by 5 days before the meeting only 41 had replied they would come. On January 12 Dr. Gardner was the genial host at his Kensington home for the steering committee meeting. We were not going to turn back. We decided to meet at Georgetown Faculty Lounge as scheduled; we would have a social hour and buffet dinner preceding the meeting. I notice that we have kept to this locale and this format for most of our later meetings. Georgetown offered certain advantages - central location, ample parking, no rental and low cost social lubricant. Inflation has caught up with us; we could charge in those days 50¢ per drink and still make 100% profit. It was decided to hold the line on the menu and allow a cash surplus. It would help defray the cost of the next mailing or if the section is not formed it would go to OSA headquarters for partial payment of the previous printing and mailing. On 12th January we were prepared for a go-no go decision.

I recall that the next 5 days were quite exciting. I had to phone the Cafeteria Chief, Mr. Poporis, every day as more people called into say they would come. By the time of the meeting we had name tags ready for everyone and a printed list of attendees for distribution - not 41 but 99. Dr. Gardner presided with accustomed ease over the business meeting. Action was taken to establish local section; to augment the steering committee by the addition of Dunkelmann, Fastie, Koomen and Dorothy Nickerson; to instruct the committee to act as temporary officers to plan the next meeting, to prepare a constitution and by-laws, as also a slate of officers.

The organizational meeting was held on May 23, 1962, so today we are just one week ahead of schedule for the 10th Anniversary. The place was the same; also the same Chairman. Dr. Gardner used with great dexterity the book of Robert's Rules. Within a short time he managed to secure unanimous vote for adopting the constitution and electing the officers. The officers were Tousey, as President, Paul and myself as 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents, Hammond as Secretary and Hunter as Treasurer. Thereupon the Steering Committee was dissolved; someone pushed me into the chair since the President and first V.P. were absent. I mumbled a short speech and yielded the podium to the Speaker of the evening who was none other than David MacAdam the then National President of the Optical Society of America. Thus was launched, as many in this room will remember, the NCSO $\bar{S}$ A.

Our membership grew rapidly during the first year. By May 1963 the list had 190 members. The distribution of our members was approximately 26% NBS, 17% NRL, 20% other government labs like Ft. Belvoir, NASA, ONR, etc. 9% industrial labs and 27% all others including universities.

During the first two years we held quarterly meetings, four of them here at the Faculty Lounge, one each at Catholic U., G.S.F.C., Johns Hopkins and NBS. There were some eminent men as speakers including Alfred Kastler of the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Paris. The Presidents of the Section following Tousey were myself, Bob Madden, Bill Behring, Fred Paul, Dick Hunter, Dave Ederer, Terence Porter, and Elsie Dupre. I understand that all of them, or almost all are here today thanks to the vigorous efforts of Elsie. The Section owes a great deal of its success to the time and effort given to it by its Secretaries: Harry Hammond, Mary Corning, Lutz Leopold, Jarus Quinn, Terence Porter, Elsie Dupre and Irving Malitson. Thanks are also due to all the office bearers.

The past is prologue. We look forward confidently to more exciting programs and greater achievement during the next decade as young minds and new areas of research guide the optical efforts of the National Capital Section.