

HOW THE OCEANOGRAPHY SOCIETY CAME TO BE: ITS BACKGROUND AND ITS FUTURE

With its incorporation in March of 1988

The Oceanography Society has become a reality.

By D. James Baker, Interim President

How did the society come to be? There have been several attempts to form a broad oceanography society in the past, and we hope to have a review of these in a future issue. The history of this particular endeavor dates back to 1980. A small group of oceanographers including myself, Ferris Webster, Worth Nowlin, and David Schink discussed the needs of ocean science at that time and decided that we should try to get the existing societies to strengthen their oceanography activities. We were particularly interested in better communication among oceanographers and recognition of achievements in ocean science. We approached both the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and the American Meteorological Society (AMS) with suggestions for increased attention to oceanography in the existing publications of *Eos* and the AMS Bulletin, and for more involvement of oceanographers in general in Society activities.

Both societies responded positively, and when Arnold Gordon agreed to be the editor, The Oceanography Report in *Eos* was born. Its success is a tribute both to Arnold and to David Brooks, who succeeded Arnold in that position. In the past several years, both the AMS and the Ocean Sciences Section of the AGU have looked at other ways to strengthen the interactions of oceanographers — the biennial joint AGU Ocean Sciences Section/ American Society for Limnology and Oceanography meeting is one example. Ken Spengler of AMS made a special effort to include more ocean science news in the Bulletin, and we see a regular series of ocean articles there now. The AMS also added oceanographers to various committees.

Realizing The Need

In spite of the success of these efforts, however, we came to recognize after a few years that there was still a need for a stand-alone society. It is simply not possible for a society that caters to a broad disciplinary community also to provide fully for the needs of one of the disciplines. The fact that there are successful societies for geology, hydrology, volcanology, meteorology, and other earth sciences disciplines is a testimony to

this generic need which is shared by oceanography. As one of my correspondents put it, we need both scientific depth and professional intimacy for our field.

Thus the push for The Oceanography Society began in earnest. Several motivations drove us to this definitive step. First, oceanography has matured as a scientific and professional field. New discoveries, new technology, and new ideas abound. The ocean and its boundaries are central to many of the major scientific problems with societal implications, such as global climate change, ecosystem dynamics, and geophysical processes. Understanding the ocean is important in the search for resources, and the ocean is key to naval security.

Second, as a scientific and professional community, we oceanographers are now comparable in number and achievements to those in such fields as atmospheric sciences or astronomy. The last survey carried out by the Ocean Studies Board of the National Research Council showed that there were over 4,000 ocean scientists and engineers working in the field; the AGU directory of marine scientists published in 1987 shows more than 6,600.

The third motivation is increasing costs. Oceanography combines expensive and complex field operations from facilities that range from ships to satellites, with data analysis and numerical modeling on supercomputers. Oceanography has in common with other natural sciences the expense of operations and the need for new technology. And as the cost of the field rises, so does the need for making the case for increased budgets.

Given these important needs, it may be surprising that an oceanography society was not established earlier. This is partly because existing societies have met part of the need, and because the field and the need for communication have both grown rapidly only recently. Even so, during the past year, as the various pieces that are required for the establishment of such an organization have come together, the organizers have heard from many scientists who thought

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such an organization already existed.

Testing The Waters

After watching these trends develop, the original group and various friends urged action. As a consequence, I sent a letter based on many previous discussions to about 50 colleagues in March 1987. The letter asked if the idea of a new society made sense, and if the respondents would be willing to help get the society started. The response to this letter was enthusiastically in favor, and led to a second letter sent in November 1987 to 225 oceanographers representing the full range of disciplines and institutions. The second letter was also sent to a number of oceanographers outside the U.S. to gauge their interest in such a venture.

We decided that we would let the response to this letter determine whether we should go ahead with a call to the full community. This letter also asked recipients if they were willing to provide a contribution to a mailing to the full community. The decision would be clear — if there were not enough interest or funds generated, then we would abandon the effort. The response again was overwhelmingly in favor, with positive responses outweighing negative ones by about ten to one. Contributions totaled about \$3,200, enough for printing and mailing to the broad community.

It is of interest to note the reasons given by those who responded with both positive and negative reactions to the notion of the society. The positive support has ranged all the way from those who support a full service society and believe that we should start it now to those who see a need but believe we should start slowly. The lack of a voice for oceanography was emphasized by many. The need to include the international community was noted both from U.S. and from non-U.S. oceanographers. Then there are also those who have told me that they are willing to join anything, as long as it's new.

On the other side, a number of thoughtful responses articulated ideas about the proliferation of new organizations, the support of oceanography by the existing societies, and the need for earth science disciplines to work together, especially in a time when we see how closely the sciences interact. The points noted here, especially in terms of starting small, will be helpful in guiding the society as it develops. As many of you know, the response from the AGU has been cautious. However, Ferris Webster has put it best when he says that, as the example of the American Meteorological Society shows, a society for ocean scientists can fruitfully exist alongside a national union representing the broader interests of all the geophysical sciences. There is room for both.

The November letter pointed out that there are many activities — scientific, professional, and educational — that a society can undertake. Typically such groups convene or co-sponsor meetings; publish a variety of publications including technical journals, handbooks, atlases, and popular accounts; provide consensus viewpoints to funding groups like Congress and federal agencies; develop educational materials, document the history of the field, and provide career opportunity booklets, among other things. A focus on oceanographic education is important for such a group. A review of educational programs and plans is essential for a healthy field, and a logical activity for a scientific society that represents a large community.

With the responses from the November letter in hand, a group consisting of myself, Neil Andersen, Melbourne Briscoe, Robert Heinmiller, Susan Kubany, Christopher Mooers, and Gabriel Csanady met informally in New Orleans in January. We agreed that a formal organizational meeting should be held in February in Washington to establish an interim structure for the society, and that we should proceed with incorporation and a bank account.

An Interim Organization

The formal organizational meeting was held on February 18, 1988. I asked all those who had responded positively whether they could come to a first organizational meeting, which was attended by Andersen, Briscoe, Brooks, Jack Clotworthy, Gordon, Leonard Johnson (Office of Naval Research), Mooers, Michael Reeve, Schink, and Stanley Wilson. John Byrne attended briefly.

At this meeting, we discussed the responses to the initial letters, the organization of the society, publications, advocacy, education matters, relation to other societies, meetings, and next steps. We agreed that a letter should go out to the broad community, that it should include a statement about the magazine and an application form. We agreed on a statement about membership qualifications, on membership categories, and on dues amounts. That mailing has now gone out. The incoming returns, which have been excellent, and this first issue of the magazine, are evidence that we are on our way.

We were in general agreement that the ocean community is well served already with journals and that there are probably too many meetings already. We believe that the meetings situation should be reviewed by the representatives of the various societies. It may be that we should be considering regional meetings around the country. The international meeting situation is also in need of review. It may be that this could be an agenda item for the new society together with

others. At the outset, however, we decided that the new society will focus on other areas, such as the magazine. This is not to say that we will not eventually branch out to other activities, because our goal is to help the science, and if the science needs it, we will consider how it should be done.

We also agreed that electronic mail will be an important aspect of the activities of the new society. There is unanimous agreement among the organizers and from the respondents that we should use electronic mail as a prime medium of communication, and that we should work with Omnet, which has led the ocean community into the electronic world.

Another activity of importance will be the recognition of scientific achievement by oceanographers, particularly young scientists and students. Early recognition of outstanding work is an important feedback to a young person who wants to develop a career. The society can be a mechanism for such recognition. We hope to develop a full range of awards for professional recognition of achievement, which need not be limited to young scientists.

To help guide the society, we are mailing a questionnaire to all charter members. The answers to the questionnaire will provide community direction on the highest priorities for the scientific, professional, and educational activities of the new society.

The organizational meeting also agreed on the elements of a draft constitution for the society, which will have a council as the governing body and three-year terms for counselors. Officers would have two-year terms of office. The draft of the constitution will be mailed to all charter members for comment and eventual approval.

At the organizational meeting, we elected interim officers: Baker, President; Andersen, Treasurer; and Briscoe, Secretary; Brooks was appointed Editor of Society Publications. Members of the Interim Council are Andersen, Baker, Briscoe, Brooks, Johnson, Mooers, Schink, and Wilson. These appointments will stand until the charter members have an opportunity to nominate a slate of officers and council members and then elect the persons they want.

Plans For The Future

Our timetable is the following: We plan to mail the draft constitution to the charter members this summer. A nominating committee will provide names for the election slate by the end of September. Ballots will be mailed by the end of October, and we hope to have these back by the end of November. This will allow us to have the society launched by the end of this year.

Now that we are well on the way to being organized, we can look at what we can expect the new society to do for us. If successful, the new

society will help us get a sense of community. It will help those involved with individual and small programs to have a stronger voice in decision making. It will help those involved in large programs to develop a consensus about what should be done when. And the new society will help us educate those who make decisions about the future of oceanography, ranging from the general public to the federal agencies and Congress.

Moreover, the more consensus we can reach about the programs we need, the better the opportunity of getting support that is required. In his recent presidential address to the annual meeting of the National Academy of Sciences, Frank Press called on scientists to do a better job of setting priorities for large new programs. He noted that an unprecedented number of large and expensive new scientific ventures driven by a "golden age" of discovery have been laid on the table at a time of record budget deficits.

Press urged the scientific community to help provide guidance on priorities of projects, rather than offering confrontation and competition. Although this is not an easy matter to contemplate, it is clear that the fields that do learn how to set priorities and to stick to them will fare better in the budget process than those that insist on having everything at once.

How can a new society help us achieve consensus? The first issue is communication. We must have good communication among all the disciplines so that we know what we are thinking. The society will help here by publishing *Oceanography Magazine*. As Brooks points out in his editorial in this first issue, this is a magazine run by oceanographers for oceanographers to chronicle the field. We need your help if it is to work.

The second issue is setting of priorities. Up to now, we have had no broad individual representation that focuses on oceanography. Our representation must first focus on the need for ocean science and the support of the community for the plans that have been developed at the federal agencies, such as the Long-Range Plan of the Ocean Sciences Division of the National Science Foundation or the Oceanography from Space Plan of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Cooperative Interests

While we in the U.S. were canvassing our own community, a similar activity was taking place in the United Kingdom. A group of oceanographers there led by Ronald Currie, David Pugh, and John Woods decided that a revitalized society effort was necessary for all the reasons we have discussed; they have worked to develop a new legal status for the venerable (1903) Challenger Society. The Challenger Society for marine sci-

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ence is now in operation and soliciting members. Sir Anthony Laughton is the new President, John Huthnance is the Secretary, and David Pugh is the Treasurer. From our side, we welcome this new activity, and will report on Challenger Society activities for our members. We look forward to a close interaction.

There has been a strong interest from other parts of the world as well. When I visited China in 1983, Chinese oceanographers expressed surprise that the U.S. did not have an oceanographic society, as theirs is an important factor in communication.

A brochure outlining the aims and activities of The Oceanography Society was distributed at the Executive Council meeting of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in Paris in March, 1988, and there was wide-spread interest. A number of delegates agreed to become charter members, and a mailing list of interested personnel was begun. Dale Krause of the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Marine Division expressed interest in helping developing countries to start their own branches of The Oceanography Society.

Within the U.S., it will be useful and effective for all the groups representing ocean science to work together. Kenneth Spengler of the American Meteorological Society has already been helpful in offering advice in organizational matters. Richard Barber of the American Society of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) made a number of useful suggestions. In July, 1987, Fred Spilhaus of the AGU proposed to me that a council of society presidents be established to meet the needs of ocean sciences. I think that this is an excellent idea, and I have written to the presidents of AGU, ASLO, AMS, and MTS proposing that we have such a meeting to discuss how we can work together.

An apt historical precedent for establishing a

new society can be found in the establishment of the American Historical Association in 1884. Prior to that time, historians had been represented by a section in the American Social Sciences Association, which had been founded in 1865. The historians felt that "we are drawn together because we feel there is a new spirit of research abroad — a spirit which emulates the laboratory work of the naturalists. That spirit requires for its sustenance mutual recognition and suggestion among its devotees" (*Am. Hist. Rev.*, 90, 2, 1985).

From its small beginning of about 220 members, the association grew to over 11,000 members in 1984. The association has been responsible not only for promoting scholarly work, but also for working with Congress through the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History.

The latter group has been key not only in protecting the funding of the National Endowment for the Humanities, but also for promoting the passage of a bill that reestablished the independence of the National Archives.

There are clearly precedents for The Oceanography Society here, and we would do well to emulate the historians.

We have been aided greatly by donations of time and money from various groups. Particularly I would like to mention Omnet for their help with electronic mail issues; James Worsley of the legal firm of Ober, Kaler, Grimes and Shriver, for providing help and advice in incorporation, tax status and trademarks and copyright; and Norman Martin of the Texas A&M Sea Grant Program for helping with the design and production of *Oceanography Magazine*.

Without the many contributors and volunteers who have helped, we never would have made it this far. We could conclude with *ad astra per aspera*, but better perhaps is *ad mare per Societum*.

THE CHALLENGER SOCIETY

While U.S. oceanographers have been active forming The Oceanography Society, a group of marine scientists in the U.K. have been working along similar lines to build an active society for marine scientists there.

The Challenger Society was originally founded in 1903 for the promotion of the study of oceanography. In those days it served as a focus for Edwardian gentlemen interested in oceanography to meet and dine together. In later years the society became more active and less exclusive, but still it had no formal legal basis.

Following discussions with other societies, the members of The Challenger Society decided to work towards full legal status. This has now been achieved, with Sir Anthony Laughton, formerly director of the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences, Deacon Laboratory, as its first president.

Surprisingly, the original society had decided against appointing a president, probably because they were unable to choose between two equally strong candidates.

The society plans a full programme of meetings and a regular newsletter. The possibility of a regular semi-popular journal is also being considered.

These are early days under the new arrangements, but there is considerable enthusiasm within the society, not only to serve the members' interests, but also to support marine science in schools and colleges. We hope that The Challenger Society and The Oceanography Society can work together to achieve common goals.

Contributed by David Pugh,
Treasurer, The Challenger Society