

Conference reports and meetings

Lessons from IUPAC's History

In 1997 CHF received IUPAC's records—some 160 boxes of correspondence from 1919 to the 1970s—following the move of its U.K. headquarters to the United States (see CH, *Spring and Summer 1998*).

Following the 30th General Assembly of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) in 1979, the editor of *Chemistry in Britain*, P. J. Farago, wrote a one-page report, "IUPAC: The Kraken Wakes," that began: "For most the charmed circle, IUPAC, is synonymous with vaguely musty good works." The title and opening epitomize the tone of his report, which had great impact on union activities in the following two decades.

As incoming president of IUPAC (1979–81), I was unfamiliar with the terms *kraken* (the Scandinavian sea monster) and *charmed circle*, but their import was clear in context. Despite the contention of some IUPAC members that the expression *charmed circle* was inaccurate for a group a thousand members strong, Farago meant to describe a group of people who work only for that group, and not for the wider community. While a member of the IUPAC Organic Chemistry Division, I had come to a similar conclusion. During my two-year presidency, therefore, I undertook a critical evaluation of the goals, activities, and results of all 33 commissions of the 7 divisions of IUPAC, with the consent and cooperation of the new vice president, Saburo Nagakura, and the experienced secretary general, Guy Ourisson.

We learned that IUPAC's activities in many fields are highly regarded internationally in both academia and industry and in both developed and developing countries. The work of the CHEMRAWN (Chemical Research Applied to World Needs) Committee clearly belongs to that category. But we also learned that some work holds little or no interest for chemists apart from members of the various IUPAC commissions. A particularly striking case was the Commission on Medicinal Chemistry of the Organic Chemistry Division, which edited a widely distributed newsletter. Its contents were

readily available elsewhere, so we declared this commission redundant. We also found on our list of so-called current projects activities that began many years before but that had long since ceased functioning.

My proposal, which was accepted by the executive committee in early 1981, was to dissolve 5 of the 33 commissions. When brought before council at the 31st General Assembly in mid-1981, the proposal generated lively discussion among the national delegations, because never before had such drastic criticism of a significant percentage of all commissions been made in the 62 years since IUPAC was founded. The majority of council delegations, however, realized that this proposal solved a significant part of IUPAC's need either to reduce its activities or to increase annual subscriptions of the national delegations. We decided to suspend and later dissolve the Commission on Reclamation of Solid Waste (Applied Chemistry Division) and to place four other commissions under review, thereby forcing them to review their respective missions and to formulate clearer goals. This first critical assessment has since become part of the standard operating procedure of each new presidency.

As one of the 8,000 or so affiliate members of IUPAC, my statutory commitment as past president came to an end in 1983, and I gleaned my information on critical assessments made in the 1980s and 1990s mainly from reports of the General Assemblies published in *Chemistry International*. They read like the annual state-of-the-nation reports made by heads of state. This static structure changed in 1997, when Joshua Jortner, the incoming IUPAC president announced a redefined mission of IUPAC at the General Assembly: "To advance the worldwide aspects of the chemical sciences and to contribute to the application of chemistry in the service of mankind. In so doing, IUPAC promotes the norms, values, standards and ethics of science." Based on that mission, Jortner articulated the "IUPAC Strategic Plan—1998," long-range goals and strategic thrusts to guide the kinds

of scientific work IUPAC should undertake. One striking change, from the present numerous commissions to time-limited projects of ad hoc working groups, will further increase the union's usefulness and efficiency.

Heinrich Zollinger

Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zürich

Pioneers Meet

An air of expectation, the murmur of excited voices—this was the electric atmosphere that characterized this first-ever conference mix: pioneers of science information, information professionals with historical interests, historians of science and technology, and graduate students in related fields. The History and Heritage of Science Information Systems Conference, 23–25 October 1998, was off to a festive beginning in Pittsburgh.

The gathering was cosponsored by CHF and the American Society for Information Science. It was made possible by a grant from the Eugene Garfield



Historians meet practitioners at the History and Heritage of Scientific Information conference: (from left) Robert Seidel, Bruce Lewenstein, Eugene Garfield, Henry Small of ISI, and Timothy Lenoir.

Foundation and planned by a committee chaired by Robert V. Williams, professor of library and information science at the University of South Carolina and CHF's first Garfield Fellow in the History of Information Science. Funding from the Division of Information