

Reflections

The BBRC: origin, time, temper, and purpose

...the business of research is the discovery of new insights rather than refinement of old...

One is supposed to eventually, look back over the dust of history. I rather enjoy the view ahead, the sea of wonderful faces blending with a new scene beyond. A half-century ago, the BBRC was conceived in Bill (W.D.) McElroy's living room within a conversation with David Boner that I comfortably shared.

According to E.O. Wilson [1], "*A tumbler fell somewhere in my mind, and a door opened to a new world.*" This tumbler fell upon the demise of "Notes" to the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, on change in editorial policy in May 1949, Volume 170. Three more fledgling editors joined, Paul Berg, Bernard Horecker, and Howard Schachman, and an offset print journal became from author-typed script, in time, to an enlarged format, computer composition, and Internet submission.

What kind of world was this when young scientists had accustomed to publish within a month the essence of new discovery? There were plenty of little colleges across the land, fewer larger ones. Jobs were scarce, but college was inexpensive. There were many problems to be solved, and attacking them added to the spirit—the attitude. By 1940, many ventured from safe, rewarding, though restrictive, cocoons into a freedom to reach out and the stimulus that reaching provided. With time available to learn, and with people long admired out there, reaching for the expected, worlds until then undreamed of began to open. This ambiance was still the essence for the 1950 decade.

The biologically interested were tossed into a world of chemicals. Nutrition speaks in structures, amounts, common cell pieces, microbes growing into world center, by number, speed, as measurers, prime sources, and tools. The student crop, some with Ph.D.'s were, or were near to, exiting "The Depression."

Shortly, the disturbance that was sending Europeans stateside intensified on American shores, scattering the young, scientists among them, while the government brought money for special needs. Fundamentals peeked out, a few problems were solved, many were shelved, incubating for the duration. As the intensity cleared, solutions originated, intensified in the decade of the JBC Notes demise. At Johns Hopkins University, the McCullum-Pratt Institute, assembled in a greenhouse led by Bill McElroy. Two symposia, Phosphorous Metabolism 1951 [2] and Enzyme Mechanisms 1954 [3], reunited the eager recovering clan, adding more. An enlightening third gift, in 1952 was the Paris Second International Biochemical Congress, where Georges Cohen, the secretary, gathered all the young he could find, and a few imagined. Should the back looking face of Janus require more clarity, some 20 reviews by then-young biochemists may help; see *FASEB J.* **5 & 6**, 1991–92, "Fifty Yeas Ago and Now."

Back to the BBRC, with some bravado, half a dozen young editors were initiators. A prime assist was a working contact with an experienced, fortunately venturesome, publisher, Kurt Jacoby, president of Academic Press, who also desired to preserve the freshness of JBC Notes. Soon BBRC became international with editors from Europe and the Orient, now attracting fresh manuscript sources, in areas opening, particularly to the developing world. Three editors-in-chief have served: Bill McElroy, Bernie Horecker, and Bill Lennarz. Nearly 50 editors have contributed

since the founding, nearly half currently. Dr. Horecker gave a succinct review at the 40th year [4].

The success in submission, growth, and coverage has perhaps gained most from rapid, significant advances in genetic reasoning into chemical structures and terminology. With the entry physics precision, concepts, methods, micro and smaller scale, the access of physical sciences to biological subject matter, coupled with quantitative attention in the medical and agricultural industries, may well continue to serve as a good omen to BBRC futures. Also critical over intervening years are the development of innovations in submission coverage, increases in numbers of manuscripts from authors of emerging countries, expanded internationalization of the editorial board talent, and the advent of other journals in several countries, and fields, of similar format. Changes continue with electronic submissions, permitting also better editor response time.

References

- [1] E.O. Wilson, Consilience, Unity of Knowledge, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1998.
- [2] W.D. McElroy, B. Glass (Eds.), Phosphorus Metabolism, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1951.
- [3] W.D. McElroy, B. Glass (Eds.), The Mechanisms of Enzyme Action, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1954.
- [4] B.L. Horecker, Forty years ago, *Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun.* 266 (1999) 618.

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