MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AGENT*

† B. Z. and K. H. Steinbach

ABSTRACT

This paper was written while vacationing on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. It deals with current conditions, shortcomings, and the potential improvement of the lots of its people through technology transfer. The authors’ thoughts reflect a longstanding love affair with the Island and its people. They are unfinished but the message to the reader is clear. There is a hitherto overlooked dimension of Technology Transfer activities, the responsibility of the transfer agent to pursue his mission with wisdom and concern for all potential consequences of technological innovations.

† Dr. Karl H. Steinbach is Special Assistant for Science and Technology, U. S. Army Mobility Equipment Research & Development Command, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060. He serves as a member of the Executive Committee, Federal Laboratory Consortium for Technology Transfer and is actively involved in technology assessment and technology transfer activities.

Bernard Z. Steinbach is a student at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA with special interest in historical aspects of community development.

NOTES FROM AN ISLAND

Thirty miles southeast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, amidst the fury of the mighty Atlantic, lies the secluded Island of Nantucket. Secluded but bursting with Bluefish; and, ours were already frying nicely in the pan on the stove while we sipped our cocktails waiting for the arrival of a family friend from Paris. Ruth was to arrive by plane at 6:30, and someone was already on the way to the airport to pick her up. It wasn’t long, however, before we discovered that her plane couldn’t land due to the thick fog. The Bluefish were still frying, the salad was getting soggy, seconds on the drinks had already been served, and Ruth was an hour overdue. It wasn’t until the Bluefish were dry, the guests impatient, and our tempers flaring that we got word from Ruth that she would be arriving by ferryboat at 11:00 p.m. The fog had done it again. Landing men on the moon we can do, but land a plane in the fog — no way. Why there isn’t a nice machine to guide a plane in safely through the thickest pea soup imaginable is beyond conception. Alas, it must be time to visit the think tank.

In touch with America and yet set off from the continent, one finds that Nantucket is in the mainstream of western society. It is not unlike other American towns and communities which toil with economic, social, and political problems. In fact, the Island exhibits great potential as a watering ground for technology transfer activities.

*Editor’s Note:

The following essay was selected for publication in the Journal of Technology Transfer because of the interesting and thought-provoking considerations of the consequences of innovation. The essay format may appear to some readers to be unusual for a technical journal; however, the rigor of presentation more than compensates for the liberties taken. — J.A.J.

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Walking along the wharves of Nantucket is a pleasant experience. One catches sight of many beautiful boats, ranging from company-owned motor cruisers, with berths for twenty, to sleek sail-racers with no cabin at all. Scattered along the docks are old scallop shanties, recently converted to art galleries and resort leisure-wear stores. The sea gulls breeze through the blue sky awaiting food scraps, young boys sit on the piers fishing for harbor minnows, and land lubbers’ stomachs yearn for some tasty seafood offered by the elegant restaurants. It is with those first rumbles of the stomach that one realizes the lack of the usual fishy smell associated with seaside towns. Indeed, one smells hamburger grease in the air rather than the pungent odor of fishy sea spray. So, one looks around, asks questions, and eventually discovers that Nantucket lacks a real fishing fleet, not to mention industry.

Sitting in a restaurant, savoring generously buttered sea scallops we cannot help reflect upon the potential possibilities for employment, renewed economic strength, social mobility, and general well being of the islanders, were Nantucketers to invest in a modern, productive, and efficient fishing industry. The resources are at one’s fingertips: a 200-mile fishing limit protecting native fishermen from