PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

THE PAST AND FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY FOR
INDUSTRIAL MICROBIOLOGY

C. L. Porter
Dept. of Biological Sciences, Purdue University

It seems fitting on this, the tenth anniversary of the Society for Industrial Microbiology, to discuss with you where we have been and whither we are going.

Not only is this a fitting time for review and prognostications but I feel that I am pretty well qualified to discuss this history with you. Not only am I a charter member of the society, but I have served in an official capacity as treasurer, secretary, and president since its organization.

The society was organized at a meeting in New York City on December 29, 1949. During the summer of 1949, letters were mailed by a publicity committee headed by Walter N. Ezekiel, announcing the time and place of the meeting and explaining the objectives to be achieved by such an organization. I read these letters with little enthusiasm as I was a member of the Mycological Society of America and I felt that there was little need for this new society. My lack of enthusiasm was shared by John S. Karling, head of my department at Purdue, who was also a member of the Mycological Society. We had many conferences concerning this proposed organization of microbiologists and finally just before our departure for the New York meeting we decided that if we couldn't lick them we had better join them.

There were about 300 present at the organization session and as is customary with such biological phenomena, the birth was accompanied by many obvious signs of distress, groans, tears, and almost bloodshed. It seems that there were two groups interested in gaining control of this new venture. There was much shouting and gesticulating and for a while, I was certain that the police would be called to settle the disturbance. Finally, one group prevailed and a temporary organization was effected. Dr. Charles Thom was elected temporary chairman of the meeting and much to my surprise, because I had taken no active part in the debate, I was elected temporary secretary. Dr. Thom was elected president until a constitution could be written and a permanent organization effected. At Dr. Thom's insistence I remained as secretary-treasurer until elections could be held under a constitu-
tion. Only thirty-three persons signed membership cards at the close of this initial meeting. It was decided here also that the new society would put on its first program at the 1950 annual meetings of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) in Columbus, Ohio, September 11-13. Dr. Thom appointed a committee of organization consisting of M. M. Baldwin, W. N. Ezekiel, F. G. Walter Smith, E. A. Walker, W. L. White, and C. L. Porter. This committee was to write a constitution and prepare a program for the Columbus meeting. Dr. Thom's influence in this first year of our organization cannot be overemphasized. He was one of the most outstanding microbiologists of his day and a man of international reputation. His prestige meant much to the development of this new infant. Until his death, he was a loyal booster for this society. However, having appointed an organizing committee, Dr. Thom left further details of organization to the committee. He told me as secretary that I would be responsible for calling meetings of the committee and seeing to it that they accomplished their assigned tasks.

This committee met several times during the first year, prepared a program for the Columbus meeting, and wrote a constitution which after several minor changes was adopted at the first business meeting of the new organization. This constitution has been amended and is still undergoing revision but it continues to be the framework of our governing laws.

The society has been fortunate in having a succession of able and devoted men to serve as president, the present administration not included. These presidents include Dr. Charles Thom, who served two terms, Dr. Benjamin Duggar, Dr. Kenneth Raper, Dr. James Horsfall, Dr. H. Boyd Woodruff (two terms), Dr. J. M. McGuire, and Dr. C. W. Hesseltine.

Our official meetings have always been held with AIBS, although we have held a number of additional meetings with The American Assoc. for the Advancement of Science. Our programs have always been adequate, but the earlier meetings were not outstanding. Beginning with the meeting of The Univ. of Florida in Gainesville in 1954, there was a distinct improvement in the programs, and in my opinion the Gainesville meeting and all succeeding meetings have offered programs superior to those presented by any other society belonging to AIBS. The annual banquet was first instituted at Gainesville and has since become a tradition. At the next meeting in East Lansing, 1955, we began to put out SRO signs and these have been in order for some of our sessions at every meeting since.

At the end of our first year the society registered some 75 members and by agreement, all those joining during the first year were considered charter members. Our present membership lists about 550 members.

I have related the lack of enthusiasm which I felt for this new organization in 1949. However, having worked with it in an intimate fashion for ten years, I have become perhaps its most enthusiastic booster.

At the time of organization there appeared to be a real need for this new society.

The purely practical and industrial aspects of a learned society were mostly neglected by older groups including the bacteriological, mycological, botanical, zoological, and chemical societies. It was difficult in 1949 for a purely practical