November 16, 1944

Dr. Wm. H. Feldman

The Mayo Foundation

Rochester, Minnesota

Dear Doctor Feldman:

We have just now completed the manuscript for the historical sketch of the “Research Worke***r***'s Conference” as desired by the membership. As you already know, historical data pertaining to the organization are not complete. Some of the gaps were filled but not all of them. When you present this report to the meeting will you be so kind in my behalf to acknowledge the help which many of the members have given in the search for source material.

The job being finished, I hereby enclose record copy of the manuscript. This will be sent to you by registered mail. A second copy will be enclosed in the box containing source material, correspondence etc. and this will be sent to you at Rochester by express.

In the hope that I have at least partially complied with the request which you transmitted, I remain with best wishes and regards,

Cordially yours,



L. Van Es

(Leunis Van Es)

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THE CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH WORKERS IN ANIMAL DISEASES IN NORTH AMERICA

(A HISTORICAL SKETCH)

The Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases was not the first effort to bring about a forum for discussion pertinent to the problems associated with the diseases of livestock. As early as 1897 an Association of Experiment Station Veterinarians was organized in conjunction with the American Veterinary Medical Association, which graciously set aside a number of pages of its Proceedings for use by the newly formed body. For so far as the latter is concerned, available data do not show that it endured for more than a few years. Apparently the larger association then offered a sufficient opportunity for veterinary investigators for an exchange of opinions and inspiration arising from contacts among fellow workers. However, the attempt may serve as an indication that the then prevailing policy of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations to make every farmer his own “horse doctor” was beginning to yield to the growing availability of more or less trained veterinary practitioners. Furthermore, there had gradually developed a more enlightened viewpoint pertaining to the social-economic importance of the diseases of farm livestock.

For some years after Dorset's discovery which resulted in an adequate means of preventing hog cholera, Station Veterinarians and others conferred frequently in order to discuss the more practical phases of the immunization of swine against this scourge. It is quite probable that these meetings more clearly showed the great advantage of a free exchange of opinions and that they may have served as an incentive for the establishment of an organization devoted to the consideration of a wider range of subjects and the problems associated with them.

Since the early years of this century, the functions of Experiment Station veterinarians began to shift increasingly to investigational efforts, in which special appropriations made available by acts of Congress no doubt served as a stimulus. As investigational work by the Experiment Stations as well as of other Government Agencies increased in vo1ume as well as importance, the need of opportunities for contact between individual workers became more and more apparent. Such a need was particularly recognized by Dr. R. A. Craig, of Purdue University, who initiated steps to bring about the organization of the subject of this historical sketch. Available data indicate that Craig had discussed the project with Dr. J. W. Connaway, about two years before the Research Conference was definitely established. Apparently the first steps were taken during the latter part of 1919 when Craig undertook to lay the foundation for an organization. In this he had the active support of his Station Director, C. G. Woodbury, who brought the plan to the attention of his colleagues in the other Stations of the country. It seems that the plan had a favorable reception because in the course of March and April, Craig corresponded with a considerable number of prospective participants of the meeting he proposed to be held.

There was a sympathetic response and a gathering of interested workers, to create a definite organ­ization was assured. It was to erect a structure for which R. A. Craig had already constructed the foundation. Craig and his co-founders as well as others in their willingness to support an organization devoted to research of the diseases of livestock, in a measure reflected trends developing with reference to methods of dealing with such disorders. About the time when Craig conceived a research organization there was already noticeable a drift from curative efforts to preventive ones. Many of the latter required and still require the guidance that can only be procured through well planned research. The Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases in North America was established with this in view.

It was organized by a group of worker, who met for the purpose in the Gold Room of the Sherman Hotel, Chicago, at 10:00 A.M., May 3, 1920. The meeting was called to order by the chairman of the Program Committee. The following were present:

B. A. Beach E. T. Hallman

R. A. Craig A. F. Schalk

M. Dorset C. H. Stange

C. P. Fitch L. Van Es

W. Giltner R. A. Whiting

F. B. Hadley

At the afternoon meeting W. W. Dimock and R. Graham jointed the Conference. After a statement by the chairman of the Program Committee with reference to the purpose of the Conference, the latter elected Dr. L. Van Es as President and Dr. R. A. Craig as Secretary.

The object and general character of the Conference were then discussed. It was the opinion of those present that the plan of organization should be very simple and that the discussion of research problems be informal. This was followed by the appointment of a Committee on Organization. In addition other Committees were appointed on "Abortion in Cows in Mares?”, “Swine Diseases", “Tuberculosis”, "Poultry Diseases”, and "Swamp Fever”.

Discussions in the course of the meeting included Proprietary Remedies and Bacterins; Abortion in Cows and Mares, was discussed in length, with the special emphasis on etiology and diagnosis. Tuberculin and the Tuberculin test were also given consideration.

The meeting was continued on May 4, 1920 and began with the submittal of a draft for a Constitution and By-laws by the Committee on 0rganization. (see special file on Constitution and By-laws) Discussions during this session pertained to hemorrhagic septicemia in swine, swine plague and "flu”, Bacterins and mixed infection bacterins. The afternoon session devoted itself to veterinary bacterins, Paratyphoid and suipestifer infection in swine, hog cholera virus carriers, and diseases of poultry, the tuberculin test and swamp fever. The Conference extended a vote of thanks to Director C. G. Woodbury for the interest he had taken in organizing the Conference.

Prior to adjournment, M. Dorset was elected as Chairman and R. A. Craig as Secretary.

The founders of the Research Workers Conference desired to periodically bring together a relatively small group of workers, largely composed of colleagues who knew one another and whom there could be no hesitancy to present problems arising in investigations, and to seek helpful counsel.

It was agreed that all presentations should be restricted to uncompleted work and finished or published material was frowned upon.

The early meetings were gatherings of friendly colleagues, who engaged in a more or less scientific "shop talk". They agreed or disagreed with one another and returned to their individual problems often better, but never worse because of their participation. Many of the earlier members were lone workers, more or less remote from professional contacts and to them the Conference often yielded inspiration born from the newly acquired assurance, that when beset by vexing difficulties, they were not alone.

Although the archives of the organization include the more or less detailed minutes of two meetings, the transactions were not recorded by the written word. Probably no one thought of doing so when momentary mutual help and enlightenment seemed to be all that was desired. This apparent neglect may even have been of some advantage to members presenting the results of preliminary or unfinished work. They in the course of their efforts' progress may have arrived at conclusions quite different from the ones previously expressed. To know that there is no written record of the latter, may even facilitate a change of opinion and thus advance the cause of "truth" which must remain as the ultimate objective of all scientific research.

The simple purposes of the organization, as conceived by its Founders, could be readily accomplished as long as the attendance remained small and as long as the information disclosed by the discussions could be accepted by each and all of the participants as confidential. However, it soon became apparent that such an idyllic arrangement may in the long run be difficult to maintain. Even as ear1y as Oct. 8, 1920, Marion Dorset in a letter to Dr. Craig stated; "we will have to be careful with this Conference and keep its membership limited, otherwise it will soon become unwieldy and will not serve the purpose for which it is intended”.

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Dorset's fears were well grounded, because even during the earlier years of the organization's existence the attendance at its meetings had so increased that the original conception of what it should especially promote had become impossible of realization. Not only, had bonafide workers in research become quite numerous, but others, not engaged in investigational work began to flock to the gatherings. There came about an unsolicited attendance largely recruited from the ranks of various state and federal officials and regulatory officers, teachers and others. There can be no doubt that most of such visitors were honestly interested in the discussions by research workers. However, under such circumstances very few of the latter would be inclined to bring before the Conference any problem pertaining to uncompleted work. This undesirable situation was eventually remedied by amendments of the statutes, by which the qualifications of candidates for membership were defined and which also prescribed the conditions under which non-members may be admitted to the meetings.

The substantia1 increase of the membership without doubt, brought about certain changes in the more intimate mutual relations between members. Yet, after a11, the participation of a greater number of workers must have materially increased the usefulness of the organization. It simply transferred some of the more confidential discussion from the meeting hall to some other place, a phenomenon common to all organizations of a similar character.

In the course of the years which followed the foundation of the organization, the principles envisaged by its founders were constantly observed and maintained.

Contributors to the programs confined themselves to research projects either to be undertaken or already underway. No doubt, the successive secretaries, by calling attention to established prerequisites, when collecting program material had an important part in the stabilization of policies of the Conference.

Even in the face of an increasing membership (164 in 1943) there seems to have been no difficulty in securing material for interesting discussions pertaining to a rich variety of subjects. An analysis of the programs reveals that the contributions offered became so numerous that only ten minutes could be allowed for each communication. Discussions also had to be somewhat abbreviated, when programs of an average of 18 to 20 contributions had to be disposed of in the course of a single day.

Most of the contributions offered pertained to factual observations in the pursuit of investigational projects, with emphasis on their practical exigencies, rather than on the philosophic aspects of research per se.

On, only one occasion did the Conference deviate from its adopted policies and that happened about 1929 when it appointed referees to set up standard methods to govern the agglutination tests for Pullorum Disease and Brucellosis. Available records do not reveal the incentive for such an undertaking. It may possibly have been derived from a desire to terminate the endless discussions on these subjects, with their clashes of contradictory opinions and exhibitions of rugged individualism. Or perhaps, the idea of giving the Conference something like an official status may also have contributed its influence.

However, the referees acquitted themselves well of their difficult task, which involved a rather voluminous amount of labor. Nevertheless, it does not appear that their efforts cut short any discussions. The latter continued for a few years, but finally ended with the adoption of the referee reports with or without alterations.

November 

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