

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
NOVA SCOTIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

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96TH ANNUAL MEETING

October 21, 1957.

It is usual at the Annual Meeting for the President to report on the progress of the Institute during the preceding year of its activities. Fortunately, this can be dealt with in fairly short order due to the succinct reports of our Secretary—a fact which is frequently noted in our Minutes. At this meeting, which marks the end of 95 years of continual activity and publication, I am going to depart somewhat from the pattern set by previous presidents, to dwell on some of the activities of the institute when it was young. I do this without the consent of the Editor or the Treasurer who are the members of Council ultimately concerned with the bulk of our publications.

During the 1956-57 session, 7 ordinary meetings were held. One of these was a joint Meeting with the Valley Chapter at Acadia University, and one was a meeting at which the members were the guests of the Maritime Regional Laboratory. The 19 papers presented at the ordinary meetings originated at the following institutions:

Dalhousie University	9
Maritime Regional Laboratory	5
Naval Research Establishment	1
Nova Scotia Technical College	1
Meteorological Office	1
Valley Chapter	2

The average attendance during the year was 51, with a minimum of 35, and a maximum of 75.

Of the 20 new members proposed, 14 satisfied the requirements of the Treasurer and were duly elected. Five of the 7 student members proposed did likewise. Our membership list now shows a total of 277.

I am happy to report that to our knowledge, no names were stricken from our lists because of death.

So much for the immediate past.

Several years ago I served on Council as the Corresponding Secretary, and during my first year in that office I received several requests of the type:

“Dear Sir,

Will you kindly forward all reports your Institute has published on the petroleum reserves of Nova Scotia. We would appreciate a prompt reply to this request.

Yours very truly”

It was these letters more than anything else that made me aware of the significance of the statement appearing on the notices of meetings at that time, i.e. “Eighty-ninth Annual Meeting.” The problem immediately became one of trying to find out whether, during 89 years of publication, the Institute had published anything at all on the subject requested. Visions of short-cuts to a solution quickly faded when I found that whereas a cumulative index had been published in 1890, to cover the first 7 volumes of the Proceedings, this effort had not been repeated in the ensuing 60 years. By chance, I did come across one or two articles dealing with petroleum surveys, and these I quickly shipped off, but I was by no means sure that I had fulfilled the request to the letter. At this point a rash decision was made and two and a half years later a Cumulative Index 1863-1950 made its appearance.

If anyone has taken the time to glance through the early Proceedings, they will realize why no apology is offered for the time taken to complete the Index. Although I was primarily concerned with checking titles and authors of papers, together with number, volume and date, the subject matter of many papers was so fascinating that they demanded attention from beginning to end. A few titles will illustrate the problem which confronted me:

“Some account of the Petrel — the Sea Serpent — and the Albicore — as observed at St. Margaret’s Bay — together with a few observations on the beach-mound or kitchen-midden, near French Village.” (by J. Ambrose, 1863-64).

“Spontaneous generation or predestinated generation.” And “Magnetism, the life of the world.” (both by A. Dewar, 1874-79). “A fortnight in the backwoods of Shelburne and Weymouth.” (by J. M. Jones, 1866-67).

Our Proceedings, I found, are rich in the history of Halifax in particular, and Nova Scotia in general. This stems from the fact that the Institute was, as it is now, a gathering of persons of diverse interests.

Early after its inception in 1863, the Institute used to enjoy field trips, with the result that Waverly Gold Mines were visited in 1865, and the following year, Ashbourne provided a source of interest to the naturalists. In 1883 the Institute sent a delegate to the Royal Society meeting in Ottawa. The delegate, Wm. Gossip (who served as Corresponding Secretary for 8 years) described his train trip to Upper Canada in some detail, but one gathers from the tone of his remarks regarding his impressions of Ottawa, and particularly from the discussions taking place there, that the visit was not a resounding success. Whatever the reason, this venture was not repeated.

If the present Treasurer, Dr. Dingle, feels that his years as Treasurer are growing too numerous, I might console him by pointing out that W. C. Silver held his job for more than 35 years (1867-1903). In like manner I might point out for Dr. Hoogland's benefit that the Rev. David Honeyman acted as Corresponding Secretary for 18 years (1871-1889). With the exception of the second and third Presidents, no President has held office for more than 3 years, but after 1879, each President became an ex-officio Fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society.

To those of you who are interested in authentic tales of the sea, I would unreservedly commend S. D. MacDonald's series of 3 articles on Sable Island. (Vol. 6, parts 1, 2 and 4). Here is described the early history of the Island, the succession of animal life, and the succession of lighthouses which were gradually moved eastward as the west end of the Island disappeared into the sea. The author notes in one article that at the time of writing (1883) some experiments were being conducted in Great Britain wherein oil was being spread at the mouths of certain harbours to aid navigation into them during rough weather. This fact, he points out had been demonstrated 40 years earlier at Sable Island, and he proceeds to quote from the diary of the Superintendent who described the safe passage of a small schooner through a tremendous gale in September 1846. This feat was accomplished by tossing blubber oil into the air from barrels and letting the wind spread it on the waters ahead of the ship. Despite the mountainous

seas, no more than a bucketful of water broke over the boat during its passage through the surf.

Part I of Volume 9 contains a charmingly written article entitled "Notes on the dialect of the people of Newfoundland." (G. Patterson, 1895) in which the origins of many picturesque expressions are given. There are many articles on Geology for this was an extremely active branch of science during the latter half of the 19th century. Natural history, or more properly—descriptive biology—has a large number of papers devoted to it. But anthropology, meteorology and scientific philosophy are each well represented. Engineering and economics come in for a smaller share of space.

The common factor in all these contributions is that today they represent a history of man's observations and ideas. We, in 1957, should not look down with scorn on those early naturalists who were attempting to observe, to record and to explain the phenomena around them. We space-minded moderns might scoff at sea serpents being taken seriously, but how different is our approach to the flying-saucer situation? Again, it is true that aside from the odd unfortunate hunter, men today do not seek adventure by spending a fortnight in the backwoods of Nova Scotia, but they do cast themselves adrift on rafts where they occasionally float and are sometimes towed across the high seas. Nor has the subject of spontaneous generation dropped from the modern scientist's view; the August 30th number of the 1957 Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences is entirely devoted to a conference on "Modern ideas on Spontaneous Generation."

In all these matters the modern approach is a little more sophisticated, but no more serious than the original one was in its time. Looking backward, one can appreciate the fact that there is perhaps more truth than humor in the remark made by the University professor who, when asked why his examination papers had not changed in the last 20 years, replied "The questions are always the same,—it is the answers we change."

In closing this address it is a duty and a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance rendered by the members of Council. To Prof. Heaps' admirable quality of adequate brevity I have already paid tribute. Dr. Dingle has continued to manage the financial affairs of the Institute, and we will shortly hear how

well he has done this. Dr. Hoogland, I would gather, has the matter of publication exchanges under much better control than I did. He has received considerable assistance in this respect from Miss Campbell, librarian at the Nova Scotia Research Foundation. Dr. Macpherson, who took over the job of Editor from Dr. Chipman, has got off to a good start by producing what may prove to be our most weighty (and costly) publication. To these and the other members of Council I extend my thanks for bringing the affairs of the Institute to another successful conclusion.