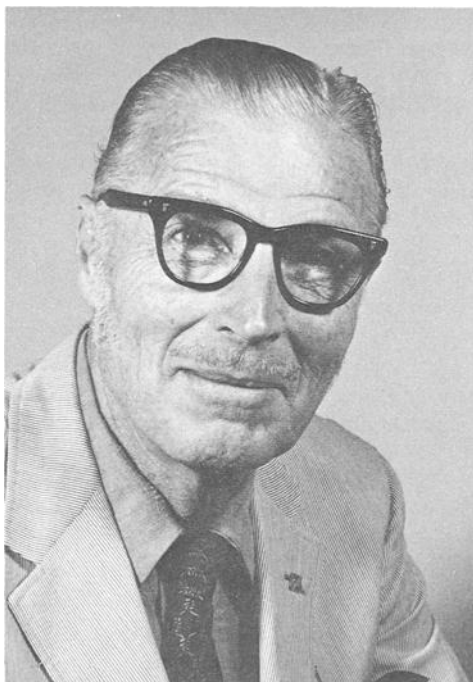


## GUEST EDITORIAL



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## Some Reflections During a Presidential Term

The privilege of becoming an officer of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences provides the opportunity to bring into focus details of structure and operation of the Academy which may have been oblivious matters prior to officership. A variety of short-term or long-term problems surface, each with its own degree of urgency and need for consensus in respect to solution. The obvious need for a dynamic Academy, able to respond and to adapt, becomes all the more evident. The half-life of an attained degree of organizational perfection is a short one in these times.

It is the responsibility of the officers to try to solve existing defined problems, to recognize needs for change, and to formulate the structural and operational adjustments required to implement change. Such solutions and adjustments must, of course, ultimately be acceptable to the membership. It is imperative that the membership be well informed regarding current solutions and adjustments contemplated or implemented by the officers. Conversely, there is need for better use of a mechanism by which officers may more

quickly acknowledge awareness of desires of the membership along with the status of any response intended. The mechanism is, of course, the *Academy Newsletter* and more effective use of it could do much to keep members entirely informed in respect to matters at issue.

Implementation of change may require amendment of the Bylaws of the Academy, or very occasionally of its constitution. In the case of the Bylaws, amendments can only be acted upon at the Annual Meeting so that a needed change may have to wait as long as eleven or twelve months for implementation. The Academy is experiencing the transition from a small to a relatively large organization during a decade of almost chaotic change in every aspect of our daily lives. Quicker capability for response and adaptation is needed, and taking steps to shorten the interval required for bylaw amendment should be given consideration.

A difficulty in finding needed solutions to problems and making structural and operational changes deemed necessary lies in the fact that the Academy is a multidisciplinary society comprising groups which are, functionally, often day-to-day opponents (for example, lawyers vis-à-vis criminalists and toxicologists). Thus, the attitudes and beliefs of those trained in law may, in respect to many matters, differ materially from those of the membership of other Sections of the Academy, with understandable collisions occurring within the framework of an adversary system of criminal justice.

Furthermore, there is less than complete agreement regarding what should be the character of future growth and development. Is the major emphasis to be to provide a means for annual exchange of ideas, presentation of new scientific findings and creative ideas, along with an outlet for publication of these? And if so, to what degree must these be accompanied by more flamboyant activities, perhaps falling into the category of public relations? It may take some time to achieve an acceptable balance in an inclusive society such as the Academy.

Features of the Academy which bear upon the ease of solving Academy-wide problems include the considerable variation in time required for preparation for practice within the various disciplines, above and beyond any credit later accumulated by experience. This obligatory educational time is notably long in the cases of forensic pathology, psychiatry, and odontology. It is notably short in the case of questioned document examiners. In general, in the instances where formal training is available and/or is a statutory requirement, the obligatory education demanded is long. It is likely that within another ten or twenty years degrees of duration of required formal education will be rather similar for all of the subdivisions of the forensic sciences, in the cases of individuals desiring to be able to qualify as "experts" in their chosen field.

Presently, however, although not having formal recognition in the bylaws, self-imposed sectional requirements are so varied, and in some instances so stringent, that individuals who qualify for Academy membership under Chapter 1, Section 1, of the Bylaws may not be recommended for provisional membership by the Section representing their interests. A high priority problem is that of formulating rational and reasonably comparable sectional guidelines which are compatible with Academy requirements.

Other matters of membership requiring examination include a restudy of the category of Honorary Member, and the possible need for broadening the base for attachment to the Academy by creating a category of membership clearly distinguished from the present kinds of membership by definition, but which provides for the considerable number of otherwise well-trained and able people for whom most of the various present sectional

members provide services. The writer's opinion is that the day has passed when the Academy should remain as remote from this group as has formerly been the case. Observation of the interest in what is going on in the forensic sciences, exhibited by various categories of personnel in the criminal justice system, permits the conclusion that both we and they would profit from their membership and attendance at our meetings, under conditions where control of the Academy still remained exclusively in the hands of representatives of the present conventional sections.

Such accommodation of Federal and certain state and local government law enforcement administrative personnel could be of special value in terms of help in obtaining grant or project support by sectional members or by the trustees of The Forensic Sciences Foundation, Inc. (FSF Inc.), for such support is likely to be obtained during the near future largely from divisions of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. If it be conceded that the forensic sciences will best prosper when their services are performed in a quasi-academic environment, then additional local arrangements must be made for the provision of time, extra personnel, and monetary support resulting from performance of non-service work such as basic and applied research. Presumably this would be facilitated at a given local level when the administrative officers concerned were members of the Academy and understood its functions and objectives.

With the transfer of control of FSF Inc. to the Academy under the conditions of affiliation approved by the membership at the Annual Business Meeting in 1973, it is, of course, hoped that controversy concerning it has ended. This is most likely the case in respect to the original issues. The success of FSF Inc. depends upon whether its administrative officers are able to generate enough support in terms of grants, contracts, gifts, etc to provide for a necessary, but considerable, month-to-month overhead and to maintain tax-exempt status.

This has been achieved for the first 15 months of operation starting 15 July 1973 largely through the efforts of the Secretary-Treasurer of the Academy, which led to finalizing a contract of project support with the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (LEAA). Under ordinary circumstances in ordinary times it might be concluded that following this successful launch, the Foundation is on its way to a long and productive cruise. These are not, however, ordinary times, nor is this an ordinary Foundation starting with a handsome endowment.

The shrinkage in funding of various Federal agencies includes sharp cuts in support of the National Institutes of Health. Individuals, departments, or organizations affected will be competing for funds from other sources such as the more fortunate Federal agencies, foundations, and, especially, private donors. In addition there are the effects of increasing regulation of foundations by the Internal Revenue Service, the now generally frightening inflation, and uncertainty regarding what will be the order of priorities decided upon in respect to kinds of activities to receive diminishing funds. Thus, in spite of hope, continued success and growth of FSF Inc. cannot be assumed as certain. The Academy must be prepared to deal with the unlikely contingency of inadequate Foundation support in such a way that the Academy itself does not obligatorily assume any associated financial burdens.

A highly desirable amendment to the Bylaws established the present rules determining the composition of the Executive Committee (see Bylaws, Chapter III, Section 2). In the opinion of many this leaves the Council as an essentially redundant body in the Academy. A committee has already been appointed (6 July 1973) to study the question as to whether

revision of the Constitution with abolition of the Council should be recommended for consideration by the members. A report and recommendation to the members should be forthcoming at the 1974 Annual Meeting.

A problem needing solution is illustrated by this communication, which was proposed as one to deal with thoughts arising during a term of presidency. Due to publication deadlines the expression of these must be finalized with less than 5/12 of the term and only a small fraction of the duties completed. The interval between required submission and actual publication is long. The editorial aspects of production of the *Journal* have been *greatly* improved. Nevertheless a number of superior manuscripts are being submitted elsewhere. Authors do this in part to avoid the paper being "lost" in a multidisciplinary outlet, and in part because of the long interval between acceptance and publication, not through any editorial fault, but because of contractual deadlines. Because there is no obvious solution to the former difficulty it is all the more worthwhile to continue to look for some means of shortening this interval, especially in respect to short "Letter to the Editor" kinds of submissions, and to implement these when present contractual obligations expire and when it is feasible to accept additional costs which will no doubt be involved. The use of the *Newsletter* to accomplish this objective would not be satisfactory if for no other reason than its limited circulation.

A number of organizations—especially scientific organizations—during their growth have foregone scheduling a banquet during their Annual Meeting. This is apt to occur when the meeting provides an attendance at the banquet which strains the facilities of the hotel involved to stage it adequately, and when the time and trouble in making the necessary arrangements become a tiresome burden for the Program Chairman, Academy officers, and the staff of that year. It seems to many that the Academy has reached this stage of growth and the desirability of continuing the production of the banquet should be carefully studied.

It is granted that there are many attractive reasons for having the banquet but these may no longer outweigh the disadvantages, a few of which are as follow: (1) The cost of the banquet is becoming less tolerable as food and services prices spiral, although this is partially counterbalanced by lesser prices for some other items in the hotel-Academy contract. (2) Speakers who are attractive to such a heterogeneous audience are difficult to obtain and command an increasing scale of fees. (3) The "fellowship" in connection with the banquet itself is often less than expected because seats are not reserved and congenial prearranged groups may often become separated in the rush for tables. At such prices many people prefer to extend their acquaintance under different circumstances, and at the banquet to be seated with friends. Most of the "fellowship" is experienced during the preceding cocktail hour, which if desired could be continued as a cash or partially subsidized bar. (4) The banquet occupies a full evening involving a considerable percentage of the convention attendance and this time could better be utilized for Academy purposes, if at all, by a schedule of scientific proceedings and parallel special events for the spouses.

Some, recognizing the multidisciplinary makeup of the Academy, favor having the evening entirely free of scheduled events so individual groups could informally meet for purposes of their own—group discussion, dining, viewing entertainment in the city, etc. Until a short time ago, questioning the value of the banquet seemed to be noxious heresy but this no longer is the case. It may be expected that careful consideration of the matter will soon be requested.

Finally, when one listens to various proposals for improving the image of the Academy on the national scene it often seems that these are superfluous as individual projects. As

long as the Academy has as members of its various sections the foremost practitioners in their fields, whether in academic institutions, in local or Federal governmental service, or in private practice, image enhancement follows as a consequence of publication of their scientific findings or views, of their position in the academic setting or in local or Federal government, and from the impact on public awareness which the accompanying public appearances usually engender. Public relations techniques certainly contribute to the enhancement of image but are not a *sine qua non* for the enhancement of an organization or its individual members, which in the last analysis depends upon the quality of achievement of the individuals in the discipline in which they are concerned.