*History of
The American Physiological Society
The First Century, 1887–1987*

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS
**AMERICAN
PHYSIOLOGICAL
SOCIETY**
1887-1987

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HISTORY OF
THE AMERICAN PHYSIOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

The First Century, 1887–1987

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Foreword

In its hundred and first year the American Physiological Society finds its members concerned about the identity, the nature, and the future of their science. That these concerns are not new a survey of the scientific backgrounds of the Society's first members demonstrates. Of the thirty "original" members listed by Howell (W. H. Howell, *The American Physiological Society During Its First Twenty-five Years*. Baltimore, MD: Am. Physiol. Soc., 1938, p. 1-89), twenty-one were graduates of medical schools, and of this number nine had been educated in schools that did not have a professor of physiology. Rather their teaching was supervised by a professor of the institutes of medicine. Until he moved to Philadelphia to become professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, William Osler held the chair of the Institutes of Medicine at McGill University (1875-84). His responsibilities included histology and pathology, in addition to physiology. McGill, like Pennsylvania and Jefferson Medical College, had modeled their faculty assignments after Edinburgh, which in turn had adopted them from Leiden. Published in Leiden in 1708, Herman Boerhaave's small textbook, *Institutione Medicae*, had become the eighteenth-century guide for teaching of sciences fundamental to instruction in medicine (G. A. Lindeboom, *Herman Boerhaave. The Man and His Work*. London: Methuen, 1968). From the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the Germanic and French usage, "Physiologie," was assumed by the English and most American medical schools. At least half of the original thirty members of the Society had received a part of their training in Germany, often in Carl Ludwig's laboratory in Leipzig.

The eight original members who earned no medical degree were making their careers in a variety of disciplines—physiological chemistry (Chittenden), embryology/comparative anatomy (Minot), sanitary "engineering" (Sedgwick), experimental neurology (Donaldson), and psychology (Hall and Jastrow), in addition to physiology (Howell and Lee). Many of those holding an M.D. degree were practicing such diverse medical specialties as neurology/psychiatry (Mitchell) and ophthalmology (Ellis), as well as pathology (Welch) and materia medica/therapeutics (Hare, Wood, and possibly Meltzer). We can wonder what a contemporary membership advisory committee would say about the qualifications of such a diversified group of applicants. The only sure conclusion seems to be that if this is physiology, then it is indeed a diffuse kind of science, distributed almost ubiquitously throughout biology and medicine.

In discovering that questions about physiology are longstanding, we do not

immediately solve our own problems concerning nature and future. We can find ourselves reassured, however, as we learn that the questions we ask have remained unanswerable for at least a hundred, if not two hundred, years. Perhaps the vitality of the science depends less on categorization and definition than on the lively imagination and dedicated research effort of coming generations of investigators.

Editorial responsibility for this historical volume became at once lighter and more rewarding when Orr Reynolds agreed to serve as coeditor and when Toby Appel joined the staff as archivist and historian. We are indebted to the editorial staff in the Society's office for the careful attention they gave to publication of the book and to Martin Frank and members of his office for much needed assistance from time to time. As editors, we share also a sense of gratitude to the presidents who served while the volume was in preparation and to the Centennial Committee, particularly to Chairman Alfred Fishman. Finally, and perhaps most important, we thank the presidents and past presidents of the most recent twenty-five years and the authors of the several chapters for their willingness to undertake summaries of material that often required days or weeks of painstaking searching and review, as well as literary composition. We believe that the thoroughness and even elegance with which they have accomplished their assignments will add substantially to the celebration of the centennial. Meanwhile their good-natured spirit of cooperation has made our oversight of this history a pleasant task.

John R. Brobeck

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