

EDITORIALS

ON THE REWARDS AND TRIBULATIONS OF ATTENDING SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS (INCLUDING THOSE OF THE A.M.C.A.)

EDWARD S. HATHAWAY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LOUISIANA MOSQUITO CONTROL ASSOCIATION

During the years 1910 through 1967 it has been my privilege to attend many conventions of scientific societies—national, state and local. Some of the meetings have been richly rewarding; but, all too often, even old and prestigious societies have suffered because some of their members have not given enough thought to *what they CAN* and *what they CANNOT* get across to the audience in an oral presentation.

Since the American Mosquito Control Association has its share of these tribulations, it may possibly be worth-while to *ask*, and *attempt to answer*, some questions as to how our meetings can be made more beneficial (a) by careful *selection of material* to be presented in our papers and (b) by using techniques of presentation which will effectively *communicate* that material to our fellow members.

The suggested answers to these questions represent my own personal views. However, as a check on my thinking, I have discussed these matters with several of our widely experienced members, and have found that, on most points, they agree strongly with the views here expressed.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

QUESTION 1: In general, how long should the orally presented papers be?

ANSWER: Most papers should be 5 to 10 minutes long. (Many excellent 5-minute papers are spoiled by being stretched out to 10 or 15 minutes.) Only for very special reasons should any paper take more than 15 minutes. A series of long papers is *almost certain* to bring on

a ruinous amount of physical and mental fatigue in the audience.

QUESTION 2: In a report made at an AMCA meeting, should an author use the same text which he will submit for publication in *Mosquito News* or some other journal?

ANSWER: He should not. The text written for publication must contain information which the reader can study and evaluate at his leisure. But, in an oral report, we defeat our own purpose when we describe procedures in full detail and race through an array of figures which the hearer cannot possibly grasp during the presentation.

For example: in reporting an experimental study, all that we can hope to get across to the audience is:

- a concise statement of the problem.
- a brief description of the procedures.
- a *sampling of representative data*.
- a short summary of conclusions reached.

Anyone who wants to know about a point we have omitted from the streamlined report can ask about it as soon as the speaker has finished; but if we bore people by giving *too many details*, they have no recourse except to walk out or go to sleep!

QUESTION 3: To whom should we beam our presentations? Should each speaker keep in mind the interests of the *majority*; or should he talk mainly to those (often a small minority) who are particularly interested in his specialty?

ANSWER: Every speaker will have to answer that question for himself; but indications are that our meetings would be

more interesting to many more people if the speakers would think more about the needs of the *Association as a whole*.

When a man writes for publication, he can write for just as small a group of readers as the editor will allow. Then, any reader who wants to pass up his article can do so with no loss of time. But when people are spending time and money coming to meetings, they deserve some consideration. In the *oral presentation*, the speaker who takes pains to speak so that non-specialists can understand him may do more to advance the Mosquito Control Movement than the man who talks as though the entire audience was made up of specialists in his field.

QUESTION 4: What flaws in presentation of papers most frequently mar AMCA sessions?

ANSWER: (a) Failure of the speaker to *make himself heard* is a ruinous factor in many otherwise good reports.

(b) Sticking too close to a manuscript is very common. We can't all be fluent speakers; but any man who talks to his hearers *face to face* most of the time has a much better chance of holding their attention than the man who buries his nose in a manuscript.

(c) Lantern slides *can be* very useful: but they **ARE** an unmitigated nuisance:

- when they are faint, and barely visible in a partially darkened room.
- when the letters and figures are too small to be read by the audience.
- when the speaker fails to hold his pointer firmly on the item to which he is referring.
- when the speaker turns away from the microphone and talks to the screen.
- when the speaker takes it for granted that all his hearers will recognize at once the anatomical features in a microscopic mount or the types of vegetation in an outdoor scene.

—when the attention of the audience is scattered by inclusion of too much material on the slide. **THE MOST EFFECTIVE SLIDE IS ONE WHICH PRESENTS ONLY A FEW DATA BEARING ON ONLY ONE POINT.**

QUESTION 5: What action by a section chairman (in an attempt to be courteous) can be a major mistake?

ANSWER: Throwing his session off schedule by allowing a speaker to go significantly beyond his allotted time. That intended courtesy often has two bad results:

—It works a great hardship on the speakers who follow, leaving them a greatly reduced audience and not enough time for adequate presentations.

—It frequently leaves no time for discussion from the floor, which should be a very **USEFUL** and **STIMULATING PART OF THE MEETING.**

QUESTION 6: How should discussions from the floor be conducted?

ANSWER: (a) Every person asking a question or making a comment should be *required to stand*; also (with or without a floor microphone) they should *talk loud enough* to be heard all over the room. In many cases, failure to stand up and speak out loudly seems to be due to *excessive modesty*; but it is wholly inconsiderate of the *many* people who want to know what is going on but can't hear. (Nothing is more frustrating than trying to understand the answer to a question which couldn't be heard.)

(b) If a questioner does not talk loud enough to be heard all over the room, the chairman or the

speaker should repeat the question.

QUESTION 7: How can we handle those cases in which *many people* want to discuss an especially interesting paper?

ANSWER: This is a hard problem; but let's not solve it by robbing the subsequent speakers of the time allotted to them. Here is one suggestion: Do not allow the discussion to run much beyond the scheduled time; but show in the program a 15-minute *consultation period* at the end of each session. Ask all speakers to remain available for discussion of their

papers with individuals or small groups while the subject matter is still fresh in everyone's mind.

If we can manage to do these things, my guess is:

- (1) that we shall see decidedly better attendance in our scientific sessions, and
- (2) that the money spent on travel to the conventions will pay better dividends to the individual members and to the Association as a whole.

ON EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF THE AMERICAN MOSQUITO CONTROL ASSOCIATION

At the Board of Directors Meeting of AMCA in San Francisco, California, on February 5, 1967, there was considerable discussion concerning expanding the scope of the American Mosquito Control Association (*Mosquito News*, 27:212, 1967).

Mosquito News is fortunate to have two excellent articles discussing both viewpoints on the expansion: "Keep on the Course" by Robert L. Vannote, President of AMCA in 1944, for maintaining the present status, and "Stand or Expand," by

Richard F. Peters, President of AMCA in 1955, for expanding the scope of AMCA.

The Committee on Expanded Scope of Activities suggests that each member of AMCA read and study these articles carefully in order to become better informed on this important proposal in the event this subject is discussed at State and Regional Meetings, and at an Annual Meeting of the AMCA.—H. D. Pratt President, American Mosquito Control Association, 1967.

KEEP ON THE COURSE

ROBERT L. VANNOTE

Secretary, Morris County Mosquito Extermination Commission, Morris Plains, New Jersey

The American Mosquito Control Association was founded in 1942 by Mosquito Control Workers for Mosquito Control Workers. Its prime function has been (and should continue to be) to represent, speak for and provide Association benefits to those actively engaged in mosquito control work. These benefits have been annual meetings, field trips, seminars

and the publication of *Mosquito News* and bulletins.

To date, the AMCA has been an outstanding success. The efforts expended by its officers and committees, who have served without compensation over the past 25 years, are a tribute to their dedication to mosquito control work. The annual meetings have set a high standard