

*As the Presidents See It ...***From an *Ad Hoc* Federation to an Institution*****R.J.H. Voorhoeve, 1979 MRS President***

Prior to 1978 and 1979, the years I was involved with the Materials Research Society as program chairman and president, respectively, the Society had passed and survived its wee hours, but its success was by no means secured. Its survival depended on the generosity and vision of a relatively small number of people—Rustum Roy, Harry Gatos, and Ken Jackson—yet their efforts alone were not sufficient to assure viability. This narrow circle needed to be expanded.

I remember vividly a 1976 meeting in which Ken Jackson pleaded with a number of his colleagues to lend a hand. Response was muted; existing professional societies already had the allegiance of many of us, life was busy, and the translation of “materials science” into a “materials science society” had not yet become an intuitive imperative. After a few days, nevertheless, I decided to join the effort, more because of Ken’s frustration than because of any great conviction of my own.

In the late 1970s, materials science research was already firmly established as an essentially multidisciplinary endeavor in electronic materials. Chemists, physicists, spectroscopists, and metallurgists in establishments like Bell Laboratories, GE Laboratories, and IBM Laboratories worked together on a day-to-day basis to elucidate the complex structure-property-history relationships and to relate these phenomena to the basic atomic structures and electronic processes. A similar development is now under way in optical materials, magnetic materials, and materials used as catalysts, as well as for nuclear waste storage, ceramics, and cements. Oddly, more often than not, the people who worked on these multidisciplinary subjects would report their work at meetings composed solely of chemists, or solely of physicists, etc.

It became the vision of the Materials Research Society to organize multidisciplinary symposia focused on the themes that were the object of the day-to-day multidisciplinary research in the major

laboratories. In so doing, MRS became a home for people who identified as strongly, or more strongly, with their field of R&D than with their original university discipline. In crystallizing this vision, we—as Society leadership at that time—often had to discourage the inclusion of symposia which were not multidisciplinary. We did not want to adulterate MRS with symposia which could just as well have been hosted by the “traditional” societies. I remember some vivid arguments along those lines, and I was always happy to see the multidisciplinary mission point of view prevail. I believe that this clarity of purpose was a key to the success of MRS.

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Many of the early practices and characteristics of MRS have become more prominent over the years, and no doubt many people have claimed or received credit for them. Few of these practices, however, were invented overnight. It’s more likely that they were handed down to us by our predecessors, whereupon we developed them further, then passed them on to still others in a more recognizable form.

Arguably, the most important of these practices is federalism. A number of the symposia took on lives of their own and found a home within the supporting framework of MRS. Their very independence assured that strong leadership emerged, and MRS became a federation of symposia. It followed naturally that leadership in MRS fell to those who had

shown leadership in the symposia. King-Ning Tu has written about the entrepreneurship required in those early years. That, too, ensured that a special breed of high-initiative individual, imbued with excitement about the newest developments in materials science, grabbed the opportunity to organize symposia about these advances. As a result, MRS became the premier forum in a number of growing fields.

The Materials Research Society has become an “institution” in its own right, having grown beyond the *ad hoc* federation it once was. Several of us trod the path toward growth only reluctantly, mindful of the ossification attendant to successful institutions. In the short span of years about which I am writing, the Von Hippel Award was initiated, symposia proceedings were published for the first time (Harry Leamy deserves the lion’s share of credit), and the corporate associates program was established (Elton Kaufmann). The Society moved into the black, financially (Kathy Taylor), as membership was conferred across the board on the rapidly rising number of meeting attendees registered by Ernie Hawk (Ernie’s unselfish loyalty over many years deserves special mention). In 1978 the number of meeting attendees surpassed 700 and, in 1979, went beyond 1,000. The rest, as they say, is history—and MRS had made that history! I remember that at the 1979 meeting, Jim Mayer, then at Cornell, flush with excitement at the success of that meeting, commented that something of lasting importance had been accomplished. Having been recruited somewhat reluctantly to the service of MRS, I, in turn, recruited people who later served it with great distinction: Kathy Taylor and Russ Chianelli, both through their interest in catalytic materials. We all had the satisfaction of contributing to a success story beyond our most ambitious plans and dreams. Since 1980, my career has taken me outside materials science. But I look back with gratitude at my involvement with MRS, and at how much it and the wonderful, dedicated people I encountered enriched my life.

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SEPTEMBER SPECIAL

Rustum Roy and Harry Gatos, the first two presidents of MRS, will author the final articles in the “As the Presidents See It” series.