

## Foreword

“The only thing new in the world is the history you do not know”, Harry S. Truman, 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

From the vantage point of the present, President Truman’s oft quoted adage rings true. We must know our past to better understand where we are now. The past of the American Otological Society’s (AOS) is long and noteworthy with a lengthy list of contributions over the last century and a half which shaped otologic practice around the world. As the America’s second oldest medical society, founded in 1868, the AOS has been and continues to serve as the focal point for discoveries and discussions on otologic subjects.

Why is the history of the AOS important? Modern day otologists truly do stand on the shoulders of those who have preceded us. The work of generations past has answered many questions in our field, but has raised more, spurring on present research and the further acquisition of knowledge. This is an endless cycle that is best appreciated by staying current and by looking back.

The explosion of knowledge and technology has been dramatic over the past 150 years, which only makes the work of earlier generations of otologists more impressive. Imagine a practice of otology without the benefit of a surgical microscope or even an audiometer. Our predecessors were individuals with tremendous character, persistence and determination. We not only owe them a debt of thanks for their scholarly work, but we continue to hold their principles and grit in high esteem.

Through the efforts of past leadership, the highlights of AOS history have been well documented. Both primary sources

as well as synopses are available to interested readers. The primary source – the Transactions of the American Otological Society date back to the society’s first scientific session held during the second annual meeting on July 21, 1869 at the Atlantic House in Newport, Rhode Island (Figures 1, 2). The AOS Transactions, which summarized the proceedings of the most recent annual meeting, are available for nearly all of history of the AOS.<sup>1</sup>

The Transactions of the American Otological Society began with the formation of the Society in 1868 and was published annually either as a bound volume (1868-2001) or online (2002-06) for 138 years with the exception of the war years of 1943 and 1945. Typically, the Transactions included a list of members and incumbent officers, the Presidential Address, remarks of the Guest of Honor, minutes of the annual business meeting, a group photo of members attending the annual meeting, the annual meeting program, and list of past Presidents and Award of Merit recipients. For most of the Transactions the full text of original scientific papers presented at the annual meeting were published. With the adoption of the journal *Otology & Neurotology* (originally the *American Journal of Otology* founded 1979) as the official publication of the AOS in the mid-1990s, there was no longer a need for the Transactions to serve as a vehicle for publishing AOS scientific manuscripts. For its later years, the Transactions included only the abstracts of papers from its annual meeting, sometimes supplemented by comments made from the floor during the meeting. With the maturation of the AOS online presence as a means of distributing the Society’s in-



**FIG. 1.** The organizational meeting of the American Otological Society was held on Wednesday, July 22, 1868, at the Ocean House (opened 1868) Newport, Rhode Island.



**FIG. 2.** The first scientific meeting of the American Otological Society ( July 21, 1869 ) was held at the Atlantic House (opened 1867) in Newport, Rhode Island.

formation, in 2007 the Council decided to cease publication of the Transactions. The thousands of scholarly manuscripts which appeared in the Transactions include many the seminal works in otology and represent a time capsule of the state-of-the-art during the later half of the 19th and throughout the 20th centuries.

Historical publications have been produced at two important AOS anniversaries – the 100<sup>th</sup> and the 125<sup>th</sup>. The 100<sup>th</sup>, edited by the renowned otologist Edmund Prince Fowler, was published in 1968, and the 125<sup>th</sup> was edited by Wesley H. Bradley and published in 1993. Both contain concise summaries, most often several paragraphs long, of the most salient points from each annual AOS Transaction distilled from more than a hundred pages of meeting minutes and scientific papers. The 125<sup>th</sup> publication reprinted the 100<sup>th</sup> and added material from the most recent 25 years. These monographs nicely summarized the foremost achievements of their respective eras.

There are several goals for this sesquicentennial supplement. Respecting prior tradition, one of the papers provides a summary of scientific advances in otology over our most recent quarter century while another conveys the perspective of recent past AOS Presidents. The other seven contributions seek to expand our knowledge of AOS history by encompassing a broader context than the earlier volumes. These utilize contemporaneous literature including books and journal articles published by AOS members, biographical material, other documents which enhance our understanding of the evolution of American otology over the last 150 years. The scope is intentionally broad covering the role of the AOS in the evolution of otological research and education as well as chronicling its varied scholarly publications. Special atten-

tion is given to the people, events, practices, and ideas of the society’s formative years and to the gradually increasing role of women in the AOS. Taken together, this group of nine historical papers gives us an enhanced perspective on the role the AOS played in the evolution of the specialty. To make this supplement accessible to the broad community of otologists and historians of medicine the Society plans to make this publication accessible via PUBMED and also freely available on the AOS website.

As part of our longstanding traditions, the membership of the AOS takes pride in our Society’s illustrious history. Those serving now, and in future generations, owe a debt of gratitude to the authors and editors of this compendium for enriching our understanding of how our Society helped to shape modern otological practice. While the contributors to this supplement have examined our collective past, the real excitement lies ahead. The AOS is a robust, financially stable, productive, and growing organization. While our future has yet to be written, the AOS is well positioned for what lies ahead. As so well-articulated by another US President, Thomas Jefferson in a letter to one his predecessors, John Adams on August 1, 1816, ” I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past”.

So do I.

**Samuel H. Selesnick MD FACS**  
President of the American Otological Society  
at the 150<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting.

#### Reference

1. Transactions of the American Otological Society 1868–2006: <http://www.americanotologicalsociety.org/transactions>