

# Centennial Feature

## In Celebration of 100 Years of The American Phytopathological Society—One of Four Sessions to Focus on the APS Centenary

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**Jacque Fletcher, Jim MacDonald, Chris Mundt, Paul Peterson,** and I are excited to present, “In Celebration of 100 Years of The American Phytopathological Society,” a symposium planned as one of four special sessions during the Centennial Meeting of APS, July 26–30, 2008, in Minneapolis. We are equally excited that this symposium, with the financial support approved by Council, will be included as one of the plenary sessions at the 9th International Congress of Plant Pathology scheduled for August 24–29, 2008, in Torino, Italy.

Peterson as APS historian will open this symposium with the how and why the society was formed and will touch on some of the key milestones in the development of APS. The next three topics will go more in-depth on three key areas of APS service to its members—and to science and

society globally—that have helped make APS arguably among the most robust, service-oriented, and successful scientific societies for its nearly 5,000-member size in the world. MacDonald will speak on the amazing growth and success of APS as a publisher of plant pathology literature; Fletcher will speak on public service and outreach activities and their impact on public policy and funding for research; and Mundt will speak on APS leadership and service internationally. As the final speaker, and to shift the focus to the science of plant pathology worldwide, I will attempt to do justice to the topic of contributions of plant pathology to the life sciences over the past 100 years.

APS has issued several position statements and white papers in recent years on such topics as world population and the food supply, biotechnology as a means for improving plant health and increasing plant productivity, biological weapons, crop biosecurity, and perspectives on sequencing microbial genomes. Less well known is that the first position statement of the society, issued in February 1942 by the War Emergency Committee of APS to USDA Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine on the importance of not compromising U.S. quarantine standards during the war effort, stated that “... injurious foreign pests may be potentially as dangerous as human enemies, particularly since their work of destruction is likely to go on forever...” One of the first actions of the newly formed APS International Cooperation Committee, working through diplomatic channels, was to make contact with plant pathologists in the war-torn countries, starting in 1945. The following year, the International Cooperation Committee sent copies of the society’s 1946 “Summary of Nationwide Tests with Newer Fungicides” to the leading plant pathologists in European countries “to help our foreign colleagues.”

The 1958 Golden Jubilee Meeting was unquestionably the most scientifically significant and society-defining accomplishment of APS in its first 50 years. Equally or more importantly, publication of *Plant Pathology Problems and Progress 1908–1958* was among the earliest attempts by any professional scientific society to establish a framework for its science as synthesized through reviews, at a time when publications were limited largely to original experimental data as journal articles. Encouraged by this success, a Special Committee to Study Publications and Public Relations, chaired by **James G. Horsfall**, proposed at the Biloxi meeting in 1961 that APS launch *Perspectives in Plant Pathology* as a new publication of the society with its own business plan. It would be interesting to know the



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discussions that followed because this special committee left Biloxi renamed the Special Committee for Annual Reviews, chaired by Horsfall. The first issue of *Annual Review of Phytopathology* with Horsfall as editor appeared 2 years later. Twenty years later, immediately following the Diamond Jubilee Meeting in 1983, APS formed APS PRESS and became a highly successful publisher of nonjournal publications in its own right.

As recently as the 1950s, the discussion was on whether plant pathology is a science or applications from other fields of science. Of the many examples of “firsts” in the life sciences over the past 100 years, two examples illustrate both the impact and the serendipity of the science of plant pathology, one mission linked and the other curiosity driven. **Flor’s** gene-for-gene model, possibly the most novel contribution of plant pathology to the life sciences, emerged from research aimed at control of flax rust but helped spark the emergence of molecular plant biology through molecular characterization of virulence, defense, and innate resistance, now on the forefront in the life sciences but still to find practical application beyond that implemented based on **E. C. Stakman’s** earlier work. In contrast, knowledge of the molecular basis for crown gall emerged from curiosity-driven research but is resulting in major practical applications.

These and many other stories will serve to help us celebrate the rich history of APS and the many contributions from plant pathology not just in America but worldwide. ■