

# 102ND ANNUAL MEETING

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

J. A. McCarter

(October 21, 1963)

At the annual meeting the president has the duty of reviewing the work of the Institute during the past year and forecasting the aims for the future. The secretary and the other officers will report on various phases of the work of the Institute. It would be redundant for me to review these and I shall confine my remarks to some comments about the work of the Institute.

The Institute continues to serve science in this area by making available a forum for the presentation of the results of original research. The idea behind this function is a good one and has stood the test of time. Those who use this forum, because of the nature of the audience, have to present their subjects so that people trained in other fields can follow and appreciate the work which was done. This is a challenge which not all research workers are equally adept at meeting. We have listened to some brilliant lecturers who had the ability to give a clear account of their work without talking down to us, and we have listened to others whose papers, though they might have had real worth, were obscure or lost on most of us. I think it is too easy to say that the reason for the difference is to be found in the different skills of the lecturers. I think that part of the difference is due to the fact of specialization in science.

Specialization in science is inevitable. We are called upon by the advance of science to spend a longer time getting to the frontiers where original research is carried on and this process takes us, naturally, away from other fields of specialization. It is all very well to say that each science as it delves deeper into its fundamentals reveals a unity which pervades all science, as if this were going to make understanding science easy, but how many of us really know and understand these fundamentals. For those of us engaged in research, it is a full time job keeping up with our specialties. Under the circumstances, it is quite probable that someone trying to tell me about his work in another specialty may fail to get me to understand what he did and why except at a superficial level. This is not a very satisfactory state of affairs for either of us because most of us I think are not interested in superficiality. I lose interest in listening to the man because to really understand what he did and why would require me to spend more time and effort learning about his specialty than I can afford to take from my own and he loses interest in telling me because he knows that I cannot take the time to understand him and he cannot spare the time to instruct me in the fundamentals of his subject.

I am consciously exaggerating to make the point that what I have been talking about explains why, despite the enormous growth of research activity in many fields in this area, the Institute is not attracting to its active membership many of those most active scientists. This is a difficult problem which the Institute has to face.

This past year your council was forced to review the functions, aims and successes and failures of the Institute when we were required to justify to the government of the Province of Nova Scotia our request that the annual grant be raised from \$500 to \$2000. The question, "What does the Institute do to deserve this expenditure by the people of Nova Scotia" was entirely justified.

There is no doubt whatever that the publishing of the Proceedings is an extremely valuable service to the Province. For years the policy of the Institute has been to publish papers on the geology, flora, and other natural sciences of the Maritime area. This policy has paid dividends in education and economics which alone justify the increased grant. The problem "what does the Institute do for science?" is the one which has been most troublesome.

Your council decided to try to do something about the situation which leads some of us to come to the Institute Meetings more out of duty than interest. Because there are now many first rate scientists in the area with maturity in their subjects and skill as lecturers, we decided to ask them to address the Institute at length, telling us about their work. This will not necessarily interfere with the usual program and should result in increased interest in the ordinary meetings. I believe that colleagues who have given up coming to our meetings may return to them, at least several people have told me so.

To return to the increase in the grant. This was easily the most important event of the last year. It was accomplished as the combination of the work of many councils over the number of years although I should like particularly to pay a tribute to last year's council for their work on behalf of the Institute. Your council felt that it could not approach the government unless the Institute was willing to adopt an increased share of responsibility in the costs of publication. Accordingly your council recommended an increase in fees to become effective during the coming year.

It is my earnest hope that the Institute will solve the problems that face it. Your council hopes that the Institute will be able during this year and those ahead to keep on fulfilling its traditional functions while striving for a more lively part in serving science.