

Council Oral Report
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Immediate Past President

Madam President and fellow Councilors,

A common question I got as ACS President was “why doesn’t ACS have a list of its presidents on acs.org?” As one of my projects in this my past presidential year, I decided to look into the situation, and started a project to produce a list of all ACS presidents on acs.org. In the process, I learned more about these individuals who are my predecessors. I believe to know your history is to know yourself, and as Edmund Burke said, “People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backwards to their ancestors.”

Since 1876, I am the 122nd individual to serve as President of the ACS. How did it all start? Thirty-five chemists met in New York City on 6 April 1876 to found the American Chemical Society. Charles F. Chandler (6th ACS president) spoke of the need for such a national organization: to bring chemists together for scientific and social interactions, to establish a library and to organize a museum.

Among the presidents in our first hundred years were Harvey W. Wiley, the president in 1893 & 1894, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Federal Drug Administration; and Ira Remsen, president in 1902, was the father of graduate chemical education in the US and president of Johns Hopkins University.

The first three presidents of the second century were Glenn T. Seaborg, a Nobel laureate, 1976; Henry A. Hill, the first African-American president, 1977; and Anna J. Harrison, the first woman president, 1978. Each expanded the scope of influence of the ACS.

Since the start of the project, we have identified a variety of intriguing facts about the 122 past presidents: such as, 23 served on faculties of Land Grant Institutions; 5 have been from the faculty of Berkeley; 5 Nobel Prize winners have been ACS president; and there are currently 21 living Past ACS Presidents.

Now you too can find out more about these fascinating individuals. As of this meeting, you can go to the acs.org governance page, click on “About Us” and find the new section on “The Presidency.” Following introductory information on the ACS Presidency is “A Chronological Listing of the ACS Presidents.” Development on the pages will continue until there is information on all of the presidents. You are all invited to participate in this project by submission of information for inclusion or correction of any errors at preshistory@acs.org.

Madam President, this concludes my report.