The Early Years of the Pioneer Radiological Societies

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ACR Bulletin
February 1995

The following material on the history of some of the major radiological organizations has been extracted from the book The Rays - A History of Radiology in the United States and Canada written by Ruth and Edward Brecher.

In the development of any new branch of science or medicine, some means must be promptly found to bring investigators and practitioners together and to establish channels of communication among them. Radiological organizations and periodicals of high quality were founded in abundant quantity to meet the need - or even in advance of the need.

Roentgen Society of the United States (1900-1902)

Among the physicians attracted by Roentgen's initial announcement of the X-rays was Dr. Herber Robarts of St. Louis, who secured a Crookes tube and exposed his first plates in February 1896. Dr. Robart, founder and editor of the American X-Ray Journal, had a major role in establishing the first American organization devoted to radiology.

Early in 1896, Dr. S. H. Monell of New York City, later the author of A System of Instruction in X-Ray Methods (1902), had proposed that an X-ray society be formed, but "he found no encouragement and no meeting was held." The idea was revived in January 1900 by Dr. J. Rudis-Jicinsky of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in a letter to Dr. Robarts. "At my request," Dr. Robarts later reported, "Dr. Rudis-Jicinsky wrote to 40 physicians with similar inquiry." Following this initial round of correspondence, a meeting was held in Dr. Robarts' office in St. Louis on March 26, 1900, where Dr. Robarts was elected president and Dr. Rudis-Jicinsky secretary of the newly organized Roentgen Society of the United States. According to the minutes, nine states were represented: New York, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, California Kentucky, and Texas. The names of those attending have not been preserved. It was arranged to hold the society's "first annual meeting" at the Grand Central Palace in New York City on December 13 and 14, 1900.

From the very beginning, however, a shadow of dissension hung over the new society. Should the new organization be affiliated with the American Medical Association, and should membership be limited to physicians in good standing with the AMA, or should non-physicians and physicians at odds with the AMA - for example, electro-therapeutists - be eligible as well? Drs. Robarts and Rudis-Jicinsky decided to go ahead without the blessing of the AMA. "... We need the assistance of physicists in our meetings," Dr. Robarts explained at the first annual meeting, "which could not be, as members of the American Medical Association."
The first meeting was held on schedule and the American X-Ray Journal reported that it was a notable success. "The literary program ... contained 25 papers. The educational possibilities of such a program and full discussion by experts can hardly be grasped by anyone not present..." Another feature was the commercial exhibits. "Without any doubt there was exhibited in the 2,600 square feet of space devoted to apparatus the finest collection of X-ray appliances yet brought together anywhere in the world. The immense value of comparison as an educational value was here apparent... Two hours in this room were worth more to the incipient X-ray operator in search of information than two years of price list study."

Five new committees were established at the first annual meeting, suggesting that responsible clinicians and medical investigators had a clear voice in the society's deliberations. They were the Committee on Standards, Committee on Medico-Legal Status, Committee on Scientific Research, Committee on X-Ray Therapeutic Investigations, and the Committee on Revision of the Constitution.

However, the dissension which had preceded organization of the society continued at this first annual meeting. There were 150 in attendance, according to Dr. Skinner's history of the society. The new organization had been repeatedly publicized in the American X-Ray Journal and "all those wishing to become charter members" were invited to do so by sending $5 annual dues to Dr. Rudis-Jicinksy; the $5 included an annual subscription to the American X-Ray Journal. The initial constitution specified that members "shall be physicians and surgeons, dentists, investigators, authors on X-ray topics, inventors, radiographers, or their assistants in hospitals, military or State institutions, technical electricians, chemists, teachers of chemistry and physics, specialists and experts in electro-techniques, qualified by at least one year experience with radiant matter, its application or therapeutic use." One of the few limitations was a warning in the American X-Ray Journal, "No quacks or fakes of whatsoever sort need apply," but no definition was promulgated of "quack" or "fake." "None of the Eastern roentgenologists who were already contributing brilliantly to our new specialty even attended this first meeting," Dr. Skinner wrote in 1950.

The second annual meeting of the Roentgen Society of the United States was held in Buffalo, New York, September 10 and 11, 1901, and the name was changed to the Roentgen Society of America so that Canadians would feel included. Dr. Robarts reported that 105 members attended and paid dues.

The first two annual meetings "must have been chaotic affairs," Dr. Skinner declared later. "The documentary evidence, mostly within the columns of the issues of the American X-Ray Journal, seems to show that a fringe of electro-therapists attempted to either control or sabotage this poorly organized society, much to the embarrassment of Dr. Roberts.

Dr. Skinner added: "Within two years, however, our society was rescued from its despoilers and detractors, and the improvement and progress [have] been constant ever since."

**American Roentgen Ray Society (1902 to date)**

Reform, or perhaps a compromise, seems to have been achieved at the third annual society meeting, held in Chicago on December 10 and 11, 1902. The electro-therapeutists gained control of the American X-Ray Journal, while physicians aligned with the American Medical Association gained control of the society. They changed its name to the American Roentgen Ray Society, and they amended the constitution and bylaws. About 15 new members were admitted at this meeting, Dr. Skinner reports, "and many of them became familiar figures in the society, fighting for a clean, ethical society and later making names for
themselves in American radiology. Eight of these 15 new members were elected to the presidency of the society in due course. At the 1903 meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, another 15 names were added to the list of members and six of these later became president of the society after working their way up through committees and by contributing scientific evidence of merit."

Membership as recorded on the society's rolls remained relatively stable for the next few years: 222 members in 1902 and 237 in 1906. The ARRS became increasingly an Eastern society.

In 1911 admission standards were raised. Applicants were required to have a medical degree, two years of X-ray work following graduation, and three letters of recommendation - two from ARRS members in good standing and one from a physician or surgeon residing in the applicant's immediate vicinity. They were also required to "submit a scientific paper to the Executive Committee, which if approved, may be published in the Proceedings of the Society." The Executive Committee was empowered to "hold over for further consideration any applications that are ... not entirely satisfactory to the Committee," and "to reject any application upon which they find good reason not to report favorably." On May 1, 1913, the society had only 155 active members, 67 fewer than in 1902. Almost all were physicians specializing full-time or part-time in radiology; the few exceptions were physicists or engineers like H. Clyde Snook, who had contributed notably to the progress of radiology.

Despite the limited membership, the annual meeting of the American Roentgen Ray Society was - and remains today - an outstanding event of the radiological year. Nonmembers as well as members attend. Notable research findings are presented, and radiologists have an opportunity to exchange information and opinions. At each annual meeting, the Caldwell Medal, named in honor of Dr. Eugene W. Caldwell, is awarded to an outstanding radiologist who gives the Caldwell Lecture.

"One of the traditions of the American Roentgen Ray Society from early years," Dr. Arthur C. Christie of Washington, D.C. wrote in 1956, "has been its insistence upon the complete integration of radiology into the practice of medicine. This was doubtless due in part to the fact that nearly all of the pioneer radiologists were originally practitioners of medicine, but this ideal has been maintained within the society and among its members down to the present time."

One of the advances made in 1902, when the Roentgen Society of America became the American Roentgen Ray Society was the publication of the Transactions of the society, which was published from 1902 to 1908. The American Quarterly of Roentgenology, the official organ of the ARRS, was published from 1906 to 1913. Together with its companion publication, the Transactions, the Quarterly constitutes the richest and fullest historic record of American radiology through most the "gas-tube era." In November 1913, the Quarterly blossomed out as a monthly in a new and larger format under the name American Journal of Roentgenology, which is still published today and is esteemed as one of the world's great medical periodicals.

Next, the Bulletin will cover, in chronological order, the history of other radiological organizations.