Part II: The Pioneer Radiological Societies

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

The photographs for this article and for the one that appeared in the January issue are from the ACR Center for the American History of Radiology.

Western Roentgen Society (1915-1920), predecessor of the RSNA

From 1902 on, the American Roentgen Ray Society was a vigorous, distinguished, but small organization, boasting only 155 members on May 1, 1913. The membership, moreover, was heavily concentrated in the East, due in part to the withdrawal of many Western members. More than half of the active members in 1913 resided in four states: New York (38), Pennsylvania (26), Ohio (12) and Massachusetts (10). Nine resided in Canada, only six came from Illinois, and only 16 from west of the Mississippi. Twenty-three states were not represented at all, and six states had only one member each. Thus, it was hardly surprising that a demand arose either for broader Western representation in the ARRS or for a new Western organization of radiologists. Westerners complained that admission to membership was more difficult for them, since many of them did not personally know two active ARRS members in good standing who could sponsor them. They also complained that most meetings were held in the East and that attendance was therefore costly both in money and in time away from their practice. As a result of these Western concerns, a schism developed in the organizational structure of American radiology.

The records of the ARRS from 1913 to 1916 suggest that there was a general awareness of Western dissatisfaction, and a willingness to make conscientious efforts to meet it. In November 1913, for example, the ARRS cooperated in establishing a new Chicago Roentgen Society (CRS). The CRS president, Dr. Hollis E. Potter, and the other officers were all ARRS members. The first CRS scientific meeting, held in Chicago on December 12, 1913, was announced in the ARRS publication, the American Journal of Roentgenology, and the proceedings were reported in that Journal. Clearly, the new Chicago Roentgen Society had the blessings of the ARRS.

In 1915, a Pacific Coast Roentgen Society was similarly organized, with membership limited to "any graduate physician in reputable standing in his community who can qualify for membership in the American Roentgen Ray Society." [Italics added by authors.]

Furthermore, a "Western Section" of the ARRS met at the Hotel Cadillac in Detroit on February 21, 1914, and the annual meeting of the ARRS was held in Cleveland from September 9 to 12, 1914. There was sentiment for continuing this precedent of "Western" meetings.
In 1916, one midwinter meeting was held at the Hotel Chalfonte in Atlantic City on January 21 and 22, and another, for Western members, at the Hotel Statler in Chicago two weeks later. The American Journal of Roentgenology for February 1916 reported "sentiment" favorable to an even broader geographical decentralization through "creation of an eastern section, a middle section, and a western section." Also, no doubt as a further step to conciliate Western radiologists, the next annual meeting of the society was scheduled for the Congress Hotel in Chicago, September 27 through 30, 1916.

Finally, modest moves were made to open the ARRS door to additional members. At the Cleveland meeting in September 1914, for example, a new class of "Associate Members" was established, open to applicants who were not physicians but rather "persons of scientific attainment who are interested in the advancement of roentgenology." The number of ARRS active members climbed from 155 on May 1, 1913, to 170 on October 1, 1914; new members from Illinois and from states west of the Mississippi accounted for nine of the 15 additional active memberships. But these steps, although impressive, were not sufficient to prevent the launching of a rival organization in the West.

An organizing meeting for the new society was held in St. Louis in 1915. Among those attending were Dr. Edwin C. Ernst of St. Louis, Dr. Fred O'Hara of Springfield, Illinois, Dr. Miles B. Titterington of St. Louis (who had sponsored Dr. O'Hara for ARRS membership), Dr. Gray C. Briggs of St. Louis (not an ARRS member), and Mr. George W. Brady of the George W. Brady Company, Chicago, manufacturer of Paragon X-ray plates and other materials. The name "Western Roentgen Society" was agreed upon for the new organization. Dr. O'Hara was chosen as temporary president and Dr. Titterington as secretary. The first annual meeting was scheduled for "our favorite hotel, the Sherman House" in Chicago, December 15 and 16, 1915. The Brady Company supplied its list of customers as potential members; so did other Midwestern X-ray manufacturers - Scheidel-Western, Kelley-Koett, and Wappler. Invitations went out from Mr. Brady's office.

By the time of the first annual meeting of the WRS in December 1915, the new society could boast 62 paid-up charter members at $10 apiece; 30 actually attended the initial meeting in Chicago, representing 17 Western and Southern states. The American Journal of Roentgenology failed to mention this meeting, or to take any notice whatever of the organization of the Western Roentgen Society.

A further WRS meeting, including the first scientific session, was held at the Planter's Hotel in St. Louis in June 1916, at which some 40 new members were admitted. Another meeting at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago in February 1917 found 76 in attendance and 20 new members. And by 1919 the Western Roentgen Society, with 472 members, was far larger - although still less prestigious - than the American Roentgen Ray Society.

In 1918, under the presidency of Dr. Benjamin H. Orndoff of Chicago, the Western Roentgen Society launched its official publication, Journal of Roentgenology, a quarterly. Only a few issues were published under this name.

**American Radium Society (1916 to Date)**

The Transactions of the American Roentgen Ray Society and the official Quarterly of the society [mentioned in the January 1995 Bulletin article] carried very few references to radium from 1902 to 1913, and the Journal carried not a single reference during its first two years of publication (November 1913
through October 1915). Clearly the ARRS did not in those years consider radium within its area of interest. During the AMA meetings in Detroit in June 1916, accordingly, a small group of physicians and surgeons interested in radium therapy met to discuss the formation of a new American Radium Society. Dr. W. H. B. Aikins of Toronto was elected temporary president and Dr. R. E. Loucks of Detroit, temporary secretary. Thus, another portion of American radiology was carved out of the potential domain of the American Roentgen Ray Society.

The first annual meeting of the American Radium Society was held at the Rittenhouse Hotel in Philadelphia on October 26, 1916, with 19 active members and one associate member - Dr. Charles H. Viol, physicist of the Radium Chemical Company - in attendance. Dr. W. H. Cameron of Pittsburgh, medical consultant to Joseph M. Flannery's Radium Chemical Company, was chairman of the membership committee. Of the American radium pioneers, Dr. Robert Abbé of New York was a charter member, but Dr. Howard Kelly of Baltimore and Dr. Francis H. Williams of Boston were not.

Although initially devoted solely to radium, the ARS later extended its interests to include some aspects of X-ray therapy and the artificial radioisotopes. [Its present concern is focused on a multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment.]

**Radiological Society of North America (1920 to Date)**

Although launched as a Western organization in 1915, the Western Roentgen Society with 472 members from 38 states was by 1919 more nearly a nationwide organization than the American Roentgen Ray Society. In 1920, accordingly, the WRS changed its name to Radiological Society of North America. As evidence of its new national rather than merely Western scope, the RSNA invaded Boston itself, long one of the major strongholds of the ARRS, for its 1921 meeting. "With the 1921 meeting, the society seems to have become firmly established and to have settled, more or less, into the pattern it was to follow in the future," Dr. Howard P. Doub, the RSNA"s official historian, wrote in November 1964.

The annual meeting of the RSNA, along with the annual meeting of the ARRS, is today among the major features of the radiological year. Scientific papers and exhibits abound, and there are extensive commercial exhibits. A notable feature of these meetings since 1938 has been the "annual refresher courses" designed to bring practicing radiologists and physicians up to date on recent developments. Each year, too, the RSNA"s Gold Medal is awarded to an outstanding radiologist; the first such award, appropriately enough, was made in 1919 to the co-founder of the American Roentgen Ray Society and founder of the American X-Ray Journal, Dr. Herber Robarts.

The new RSNA publication, a monthly, was named simply Radiology, and was launched with the September 1923 issue. Like the American Journal of Roentgenology, Radiology today is among the world's most respected medical journals.