History of American Society of Agronomy
First Fifty Years—1907 to 1957

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This history aims: (1) to present the vision put into action of men who devoted and are devoting their lives to the science of agronomy and (2) to bring together a record of the results of their efforts and aspirations as exemplified in the development of the American Society of Agronomy from its organization in 1907 to its fiftieth anniversary in 1957.

Much of the history was written by members who were participants in the activities and events which they recount. The value of the history is enhanced by their personal contact and insight of questions considered.

The historian is deeply indebted to each one who contributed, namely, M. F. Miller, J. D. Lueckett, G. G. Pohlman, D. S. Metcalfe, W. H. Pierre, and Emil Truog, and to those who aided in initiating and publishing this record of our society through its first half century of service to agronomy.

Several excellent reports of historical information have been published previously in the Journal.

FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF AGRONOMY

M. F. Miller*1

The American Society of Agronomy was born on December 31, 1907. It has gone through a half century of development without serious complications. Its expansion has really been phenomenal. Fifty years ago, the roll of its charter members was 101. The number of active members on its rolls September 30, 1957, was 3,258. The great increase in the number of papers presented annually, and the growth in its various lines of activity will be given elsewhere in this anniversary report.

The Society was organized soon after the term Agronomist came into use by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and by the Land Grant Colleges. However, at that early period there had been organized in the Department of Agriculture an Agronomic Seminar which was meeting regularly in 1907.

At one of the late Seminar meetings of that year, a discussion took place regarding the desirability and possibility of organizing a national society composed of men in the fields of soils and field crops. There was already a Mississippi Valley organization, dealing with soils, but the group thought this might be drawn into an organization covering both soils and crops with an Agronomic name. As a result of organizing a national society composed of men in the fields of soils and field crops, the American Society of Agronomy was born.

The committee appointed were stalwarts in the Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture at that time. They were M. A. Carleton, W. J. Spillman, C. V. Piper, E. C. Chilcott, and A. D. Shamel. Every agronomist remembers these men and all present-day agronomists know them by reputation. All of them had illustrious careers.

After due consideration the committee formulated a letter outlining the ideas it had in mind and sent it to all of the men in the country who were working in the field of agronomy.

In answer to this letter, 58 replies were received, practically all the technical agronomists approving the idea of calling such a meeting. Some of the men who were associated particularly with the administrative aspect of agronomy were somewhat skeptical as to the ultimate success, and by means of the present-day agronomists know them by reputation.

A letter was prepared calling the meeting to be held December 31 as had been suggested. The letter was attached to it “the names of 43 persons who were willing to sign the call.” This letter, along with the signatures follows:

“It is requested by the undersigned that all persons interested in agronomy join with them in a meeting during the coming holiday season at Chicago for the purpose of organizing an American Society of Agronomy. This organization will be held Tuesday morning, December 31, in the buildings of the Chicago University, the particular place of meeting to be announced later.

“Although this meeting is called for the same period during which the sessions of the American Association for the Advancement of Science will be held, in order to secure better attendance, it will be determined at such time whether the organization shall be a section of that affiliated society, or take some other form. A constitution and bylaws will be submitted in order that business may be hastened and as much time as possible given to the reading of papers even at this first meeting. Papers have already been offered. Titles and summaries of papers themselves should be sent at the earliest time possible either to Alvin Keyser, University of Nebraska, or to M. A. Carleton, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.”

C. A. Alvord  Wm. D. Hurst  R. W. Metcalfe
Alfred Atkinson  Alvin Keyser  A. C. Sherrill
E. D. Ball  B. W. Kilgore  J. D. Tinsley

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