

William H. Stein



When William H. Stein accepted the Editorship of *The Journal of Biological Chemistry* in 1968, he brought to the task experience gained through participation in many aspects of the production of the *Journal*. He was a major contributor to its pages, beginning in 1938 with his first paper on the amino acid composition of elastin; the research had been part of his study for the Ph.D. degree in the Department of Biochemistry chaired by Hans Clarke at Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons. His graduate study was preceded by the earning of the B.S. degree in chemistry from Harvard. In 1938, he joined the laboratory of Max Bergmann at The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and thus began more than three decades of very active research on the chemistry of proteins. He shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1972 for

contributions to the knowledge of the chemical structure and catalytic function of bovine pancreatic ribonuclease. The present paragraphs are focused on Bill's service to this *Journal*; an obituary notice in *Nature*, **287**, in press (1980) concerns the breadth of his scientific accomplishments.

Bill's first service to the American Society of Biological Chemists was as a member of the Finance Committee, an appointment which gave him an appreciation of the fiscal aspects of journal publication. In 1955, he was elected to the Editorial Committee, a group of nine members with responsibility for setting policy for the *Journal*; he was chairman of the Committee from 1958 to 1961. He was an active participant in the search which led to the appointment of John Edsall to the Editorship in 1958, upon the retirement of Rudolph J. Anderson. A continuing function of the Committee was the selection of candidates for membership on the Editorial Board. In the fulfillment of that responsibility, Bill took special interest in seeing that biochemists who were considered to be potential members of the Board were selected a year ahead of time. Several editors were asked to consult these individuals as referees in order to appraise their editorial judgment and the promptness of their replies. This "apprenticeship" system meant that those receiving formal invitations to join the Board would be scholars with records of being both judicious and efficient reviewers. Bill also was among those who sought to attract younger investigators to editorial service to help in the representation of front-line fields of our discipline.

When Bill joined the Editorial Board in 1962, he undertook to fulfill his obligations in the same spirit. In his always generous manner, in his drafts of editorial letters he was quick to praise a fine manuscript, decline an inadequate one, and careful to explain in detail the options for revision when that seemed necessary. After two years as a member of the Editorial Board, during John Edsall's administration of the main Editorial Office from Cambridge, Bill was asked by John to assume one of the then three Associate Editorships with which came the responsibility for direct correspondence with the authors and the setting up of an efficient branch office of the *Journal* at The Rockefeller University. Bill always kept in mind the eagerness with which authors look forward to hearing from a journal in regard to the fate of the product of their labors; he did not hesitate to encourage members of the Board to respond expeditiously. He always tried to think of his editorial duty from the author's viewpoint.

As John Edsall's ten-year term in the Editorship drew toward a close, Bill Stein was asked by the Council to consider the position. But he recognized the time-consuming nature of the job. The *Journal* was growing rapidly in terms of pages published and manuscripts processed per year. He agreed to succeed John, with certain administrative changes in mind. In preceding decades, the central editorial office had rotated from institution to institution, as the Editorship changed. This policy meant the hiring and training of new staff at the time of each succession; in 1968 the setting up of an office to handle the full volume of submitted manuscripts presented a need for considerable space and appropriate personnel. Bill had been a member of the committee that had recruited the Society's first full-time Executive Secretary to serve at FASEB headquarters at

Beaumont House in Bethesda, a post that Robert A. Harte ably assumed in 1961. Bob was also appointed Business Manager of the *Journal*, and in that role relieved the Editor of the day-to-day responsibility for the innumerable business details associated with dealing with the printer. A further practical move seemed to be to set up a central office at Beaumont to which all of the manuscripts would go initially and to develop a staff there to make the decisions on the distribution of manuscripts to the most appropriate Associate Editor's Office, with the Editor being scheduled to receive his share. This was done in 1968, at the time of Bill's acceptance of the Editorship, and Edith Wolff was the first Executive Assistant to hold this position; the administrative plan by which she and the Executive Officer of the Society and the staff operate a central office has grown over the years to meet the needs of a manuscript load of about 3000 texts per year in 1980.

Bill's foresight in centralizing the first step in the editorial process, with the view of facilitating the transfer of the Editorship, received test tragically too soon. In 1969, while traveling to a conference on proteins in Europe, he contracted acute polyneuritis; he barely survived and was left with major paralysis. After only a year and a half at the head of the *Journal*, he yielded the active Editorship to Herbert Tabor, who had become an Associate Editor on the Bethesda scene in 1968, coincident with the beginning of Bill's term of office. With the hope that Bill might regain his health, a definite transfer of the Editorship was not made until 1972.

Bill's short tenure of the Editorship represented a much greater contribution to the history of the *Journal* than the chronology would connote. He had significant input into the JBC's success over a period of fifteen years during which he cooperated with many members of the Society in helping to set the scene for a journal that has now grown to have an Editorial Board of more than 150 members.

On the financial side, on the debatable subject of page charges, Bill was strongly in favor of them. During his Associate Editorship, Bill supported the view that the cost of publication is a legitimate part of the cost of research. Page charges were introduced in the JBC in 1967. He wished to see the subscription price of the *Journal* kept as low as possible in order that the publication would be available to a wide circle of subscribers throughout the world, to the young researcher as well as to the established investigator. He viewed one of the evidences of the success of the *Journal* to be the number of biochemists who have ready access to its pages.

Bill also took an artistic interest in the style and the quality of the printed product. I recall his contribution, during John Edsall's Editorship, to the modernization of the cover of the *Journal* for which he elicited the skill of Reynard Biemiller of The Rockefeller University Press as a consultant designer. Upon assuming the Editorship in 1968, Bill had a key role in the writing of the statement of Editorial Policy that was published on pages 8 and 9 of the January 10 issue of that year. As I reread those pages, I recognize many thoughts expressed in Bill's characteristic style.

Although illness forced him to relinquish the active Editorship in 1969, Bill's mind remained fully productive in spite of the frustrations from paralysis. In the final ten years of his life, through a stimulating ambience inspired by his wife, Phoebe, and their three sons, Bill was able to consult frequently with Herb Tabor, who has valued the thoughtful advice that Bill rendered both in the review of specific papers and on matters of policy. Bill's contributions to the editorial process will be missed by both authors and editors.

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