

Presidential Address

PAUL R. COHEE

First, let me welcome our guests, visitors, and all of you who are attending your first Hyacinth Control Society meeting. We have what should prove to be an interesting and informative program lined up and we are pleased to have this opportunity to relate our problems and experiences to you. We are equally pleased to have you here to share your problems and experiences with us.

May I also say "Welcome Back" to our members and those of you who have attended our previous meetings.

I believe most of you recognize that our society has reached a crossroad and must make the decision on which lateral we should choose, to best reinforce our efforts to be of service and fill the needs in the field of Aquatic Weed Science and Control. Fortunately, I believe, that each of the alternatives open to us offers an opportunity that could lead to a strengthening of the unique and important role our society has played through the years, in coping with the needs of man and society, wherever there is water.

As a somewhat locally oriented organization, we have built an excellent vehicle and, I believe, the only one of its kind, for providing information, instruction and aid to research workers, commercial interests, educational facilities, as well as to federal, state and local operations involved in every way and with every facet of aquatic weed control. Our success *must* be largely attributed to this "Something for Everybody" format or philosophy. Not only have we achieved our purpose, but in so doing, have attracted the attention of, and earned the respect of the aquatic weed science and aquatic weed control community throughout the country and in many parts of the world.

Yes, this success, which must also be attributed to the excellent leadership of my predecessors and the efforts and contributions of an active membership through the years, has brought us to the crossroad we face today.

Our conservation and pollution-minded populace is today taking a closer look and exerting a stronger influence to see that our waterways remain, or are returned to a healthy and functional status. And this is good. As you know, the presence, or the lack of aquatic vegetation is certainly one of *the* major factors in making our water resources useful or useless to us.

The "hysterians" who stand on our street corners and those who use issues such as this for political expedience to gain the favor of worried constituents, have shown that with half-truths, one-sided reporting and scare techniques, they can arouse the populace to put pressure on our legislators for action. That it be the right action does not seem to carry much precedence. As we have seen in the case against some pesticides, in many instances, these people are poorly qualified to properly evaluate the situation, much less to provide a solution when a problem does in fact exist. This does not, however, stop them from proposing one and gaining support for it. To a large degree, therefore, our efforts, our techniques and the tools of our trade are in jeopardy of being subjected to controls laid down through majority pressure. A majority motivated by emotion and sincere concern, but lacking the patience, foresight or wisdom to be aware of what all they are doing or the

consequences of their actions. There is good, sound logic in subscribing to majority rule on issues where the majority is qualified, but we must recognize that on some issues, a minority, made up of professionals, can be better equipped to speak and act for the majority. If you have doubts about this, ask your doctor or dentist. We are a minority group, a professional group. We seek out not only the problems, but the solutions as well, in a methodical, scientific approach and drawing on the many resources available to us, the most important of which is years of experience of our own and of those we follow. The Hyacinth Control Society is qualified and should be aggressive enough to command a major role in determining the course of action that will be taken throughout this land of ours, to preserve our water resources and to make them the permanent asset they must continue to be if we are to derive the fullest benefit of their existence. Our organization stands out as the one medium in this field which is dedicated to and most capable of serving these needs. Needs that have always existed, but are just now receiving widespread publicity and attention throughout the country.

We have served Florida well in this respect, but are we ready to accept this greater challenge and this opportunity of broadening our scope or of broadening our purpose?

Whenever you arrive at a crossroad, you normally have four ways to go. One is back to where you are from, which none of us want. Another is to continue in the same direction, straight ahead, with the same aims and goals, and at about the same pace, and this may be where we can be most effective. But, you can also change direction with respect to size and geographical scope or you can change direction with respect to your aims and purpose. We should evaluate and decide if we can function well as a regional or even a national medium of aquatic weed science and control. We should also not fail to overlook the possibilities of our being able to provide a similar service in the related fields of water pollution from factors other than weeds, in water management and in any other problem areas relating to water and its role in our society.

It is my feeling we have matured enough to be capable of serving on a larger scale and in a larger geographical area, *but* at this time I feel strongly that we should continue to retain our identity and purpose and confine our efforts to vegetation problems.

The presence here today of new faces and people from new areas indicates a need and an interest in what we have to offer. We have several related questions to resolve at our meeting here and I hope all of you will give serious thought to them. A new name is one question to be considered, and this will certainly influence and have a bearing on our future growth.

Your Society can continue to grow and your efforts, or the lack of effort, will be the biggest determining factor. To paraphrase a quotation used by one of our presidents, "ask not what the society can do for you, but what you can do for the society." Only with your help can your society be capable of serving you and the needs of the world in making our waterways more useful.