

"A WATERY JUNGLE" – OR WHY THERE IS AN AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT SOCIETY TODAY¹

HERBERT J. FRIEDMAN²

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome all of you to the 27th Annual Meeting of our Society, which during these years, has grown from a small group of dedicated weed scientists, researchers, and program managers, to its' present professional status, an organization considered to be one of the finest comprehensive Societies of its kind in the world. Among our members are some of the worlds' most reputable scientists. When I first became involved in both terrestrial as well as aquatic weed control some thirty seven years ago, the aquatic field was in its infancy. It was a loose conglomeration of many interests, where research was struggling, and many of the field managers actually called their own shots. You know what a different world it is today. You don't run your operation by the seat of its' pants, and research is certainly no different. Now, you wait until what you have planned is scientifically and technically correct. Sometimes only to have someone tell you what you can't or should not do, and why what you did was wrong. In other words, quoting that old French expression, "the more things change, the more they are the same."

Each year, this meeting has given us the opportunity to visit with our colleagues, to examine, disclose and understand what our researchers have uncovered, or developed; to view what additional procedures will improve our techniques from either a research or operational standpoint; and to determine the course of our future. Today, it is more important than ever, to reexamine our goals and purposes. However, that is not my task . . . my responsibility today, thanks to Richard Comes and Dean Martin, and I do consider this a great honor . . . is to attempt to enlighten every one concerning the history of our Society. Because of the nature of the beast, our history is neither prosaic nor particularly dull, and I would tell you that for every anecdote or story I tell, there are probably three or more which discretion forbids me to mention.

Today, The Aquatic Plant Management Society is a vibrant, vigorous 27 years young organization. I say this with pride, as I view the efforts and many contributions of our members throughout the world, with their wide diversity of talent. To relate the history of our Society of course, requires me to preface its' actual organization. To lay the ground work for why as well as how it was conceived. When I began the contemplation of what I had to do to bring this history together, and begin gathering the facts, I recognized pretty quickly that the foresight of one spe-

cific person affected the structure, goals and consequently the history of our Organization. That person was T. Wayne Miller, who for the past thirty one years has served as Director of the Lee County Mosquito Control District, and since November 1961, has served as Director of the Lee County Hyacinth Control District.

To set the stage . . . in early 1961, the growth of water hyacinths had spread quite rapidly throughout many areas of the state of Florida. The Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, headquartered in West Palm Beach, now known as the South Florida Water Management District, was charged with the responsibility of hyacinth and other aquatic weed control in a very substantial area of the east coast of the state, but its' control area stopped at the western limits of Lake Okeechobee. The rest of the state was under the control of the Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission, which was charged with eradication. Even then, this was a herculean task, requiring the expenditure of many millions of dollars, a financial impossibility for the state at that time. So, the problem of control in Florida actually, with the exception of the Central & Southern Florida Flood Control District, became more of a political issue. One could watch the actions of the state legislature, to see which of the legislators would lean the hardest and scream the loudest, in order to get hyacinth eradication funds for his county. The Game & Fresh Water Fish Commissions' Control Section was headed by Bill Woods, the 4th President of the Hyacinth Control Society, which was non-existent at that time, and the operations manager of the Central Southern Florida group was Zeb Grant, the 5th President of our Society. Both men were charter members. In those days, I was well aware of the harassment and pressure on Bill Woods. His budget was bare-boned, and the only time the pressure would diminish was when he was authorized to send a crew to treat at one of the counties. The crew would descend upon a given county, treat the hyacinths with 2-4 D Amine, which usually took them about a week to work the area. Then they would leave. There was usually pork barrel attached to the operation. The supervisor and the foreman were Fish & Game employees. The other crewmen were often hired locally, which also satisfied the politicians. The hyacinths would die, decay and the treated lake, ponds or rivers would look pretty clear for awhile. With the limitations of funding, personnel and distances to be traveled, the Fish and Game Commission crews would not show up again, until the situation was once more, impossible. About that time in 1961, the Lee County Legislative Delegation requested that the county Mosquito Control District accept the responsibility of eliminating hyacinths and other certain noxious weeds from the county. Since no other county agency would do

¹Invited keynote address: The Aquatic Plant Management Society, Inc., Savannah, Georgia. July 13, 1987.

²Charter Member and President of The Hyacinth Control Society, 1964. Currently Consultant, Retired Chairman of the Board, Southern Mill Creek Products Company, Inc., Tampa, Florida. Division of Crompton & Knowles Corporation.

it, Wayne, as director of Mosquito Control, agreed to accept this responsibility and challenge under certain conditions. That the funding would be by creating a special Tax District, and that he would be authorized to treat and control hyacinths in the entire length of the Caloosahatchee river, more than 20 miles beyond the east end of Lee Counties' border, without being responsible for the control of any weeds in the adjacent counties, except the hyacinths bordering the river in those counties. It is interesting to observe that to this day, there has never been another Hyacinth Control Taxing District authorized in or by the State of Florida. The establishment of the Hyacinth control Society, believe it or not, played an important role in this situation.

At this time, I would like to point out to you, the large blown up photograph at the front of the room. This was taken from an article in the November 1960 issue of the Saturday Evening Post. It shows the Caloosahatchee river a few miles east of Fort Myers, in Lee County. You can see that the hyacinths there, were so thick and heavily matted, that you could virtually walk across the river at that point, a distance of several hundred feet. Obviously it impeded boat traffic on the river, a critical factor in South Florida, not to mention how much this national publicity disturbed the tourist industry, especially in Lee County.

When Lee County, which really meant Wayne, accepted the eradication responsibility, he had very little or no prior information on aquatic weeds and their elimination. So, in his usual methodical manner, he arranged to attend the next annual meeting of the Weed Science Society of America, which was to take place in St. Louis, Missouri. Wayne attended virtually all the sections on aquatics, and came away with the opinion that the papers presented by basic research people, were strictly for the benefit of other research people. In attending a section where a paper on the life cycle of cattails was given, the speaker went on for at least 30 minutes. He virtually knew everything there was to know about cattails and how they grew. During the question and answer period, Wayne asked "To what depth he had to keep water in his canals, so that the cattails would not grow". The speaker did not know. Control was not his concern, he stated, and his interests did not lie in controlling them. But it did Wayne. In another aquatic section, the speaker reported on testing different herbicides under various conditions and their comparative effectiveness. Wayne asked what the costs of these applications were, together with the product cost. The speaker said he did not know, that cost was not a part of that study. To the weed control manager, cost has to be a very important part of his concern. The lack of cost effective knowledge would make the project useless, as it would for anyone concerned with costs. To the weed control manager, cost has to be the most important part of his concern. This indicated that the basic papers presented at the Weed Science Society of the United States did not serve the purposes of the professional field managers of operations segment of aquatic weed control, and this fact is still true today.

This experience at St. Louis prompted Wayne to discuss the possibility of the establishment of a Society, whose membership was to be professional. To stress operational

research, oriented towards control operations. Not to be an application school for spraymen, but to emphasize the relationship between operational and basic research and their joint responsibility towards the responsible and accurate administration of aquatic programs. It was also to attract other professionals, who had a strong interest in any and all aspects of aquatic weed control.

In the course of his thinking, Wayne contacted a number of individuals whom he knew were interested in the aquatic field, to discuss his ideas. Simultaneously, he wrote articles of incorporations, a set of by-laws, researched to determine that the name "The Aquatic Plant Control Society" had already been registered some years before, although by 1961, it was essentially defunct. He also determined that the name "The Hyacinth Control Society" was available for registration as an International Society, as well as a domestic one. Prior to the initial invitational meeting of the group, Wayne communicated with several U.S.D.A. officials, who were involved in aquatic research and control. At that time, quite coincidentally, one of those individuals was the President of the Weed Science Society. His response was rather negative. He stated that he opposed our intentions, looked upon us as a splinter group which would only weaken the WSSA, that he felt we should operate within the WSSA, and that he would discourage any USDA employees from affiliation with us.

In spite of that, Wayne, nevertheless invited a number of WSSA members who were affiliated with the Federal Government to attend the initial meeting. This organizational meeting took place on July 12, 1961, at Useppa Island, off Boca Grande, Florida, where we were pleased to have a substantial number of interested people, including quite a few government employees in attendance. All of us in attendance worked long and diligently to put into a document, the thoughts which we had developed and agonized over. When we completed this first meeting there was very little opposition to our goals and intent. Actually, only one man spoke negatively to us, mouthing practically the same words spoken over the phone to Wayne previously.

Despite the disappointment in the semi-official attitude, we were very pleased that a number of Federally employed individuals promptly became members. One in fact, went further when he agreed to accept an invitation from the new Board of the Society to serve on the Board the following year. This, of course, was Dr. Donald K. Seaman, who was transferred to California shortly thereafter. Although we never thought that this move was deliberate, we were very pleased, since it gave Don Seaman an opportunity to spread the word, and to encourage an interest by Californians in what our Society was trying to accomplish. This he did successfully.

In 1962, preparing for our 1st Annual Convention to be held at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, we were somewhat apprehensive that it might not be well attended, it might not have sufficient papers to present and it might "flop". That is why the initial issue of the Journal has more pictures than any other issue in our history. In other words, we admittedly did everything we could think of to enhance potential membership and interest in the Society. We went

as far as to have every member of Waynes' Hyacinth Control Board become a member of the Hyacinth Control Society. I did my share by making all 18 of my sales representatives members, and others did likewise. If nothing else happened, we at least planned to enrich the coffers of the Society, which was a bit puny. At this convention, we requested that the officers and board wear white dinner jackets to the banquet, and their wives wear lavender gowns, to which we added hyacinth corsages. Amazingly enough, every one complied. This was also the reason why the stationery, the programs, the journal and everything else we could think of has always been lavender. We also decorated the banquet tables with baskets of fresh hyacinths, supplied I believe by the USDA laboratory at Fort Lauderdale. Unfortunately, however, these wilted in front of our eyes, and didn't even last as long as the dinner did. While this little episode may not qualify as history, it certainly shows that we had plenty of enthusiasm. What was of note at this meeting was its' extraordinary turnout. We had more than 250 people in attendance, including an unexpected number of active applicators, technicians, researchers and many other interested people. Some of the more unexpected included Bill Wunderlich of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at New Orleans, Captain Noah Tilghman, a rather well known Florida character, best known for operating a number of vessels on the St. Johns River, who specialized in taking folks bass fishing. He was a vociferous defender of the hyacinth, especially in the St. Johns river. If anyone used 2-4 D where it would affect his customers fishing, he would be very vocal and active. Other guests included John Gallagher, of Amchem, who has been a stalwart member of this Society for all these years, and who has presented many a paper. Any number of people involved in the aquatic industry took notice of our society because of this meeting.

By 1963, when our 3rd Annual Convention took place in Tampa, the continuous word of mouth and public relations campaign that the board emphasized, began to bear fruit. A fairly large number of Florida Mosquito Control County directors, who had been given the responsibility of eliminating hyacinths and other weeds, as a result of what had happened favorably in Lee County, as well as pressure from the State, began to join the Society. At a board meeting after the convention had ended, concern was expressed that the unusual, but continually higher attendance figures might have brought people to the meeting who interest and allegiance to good aquatic methods might be just a passing fancy, and that their participation could not really be depended on. The board therefore decided to hold the 1964 Convention in Tallahassee, Florida, where we could develop interest in sound aquatic management, in an area where the need existed regionally, but the mechanism did not exist, other than the Army Corps of Engineers. This meeting was where we expected to either "sink or swim."

Invitations for the 1964 meeting were extended to Federal and State Agencies with aquatic interests in Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and the Carolinas. By this time, California had a pretty fair number of members. The turnout from all of these states was very gratifying. Our view that there existed a strong need for our organization, with its goals of responding to the needs of the professional

operations manager was proved. Once again, our attendance figures and new memberships swelled. As our Society grew substantially, we became recognized through our publications and meetings, as a competent source of aquatic information.

During the late Sixties, the Society observed, and collectively shuddered at some of the more outlandish attempts to control hydrilla in Florida. The Crystal River Basin had always been a beautiful, rustic, pristine area. At least I should say it was pristine before hydrilla took over. When it did, a rather bombastic, persistent, retired engineer, with some unknown influence on certain State Officials, induced the Fish and Game Commission to cooperate on a project, to be supervised by Clayton Phillippy, of the Florida Fish and Game Commission. The method was to dump 4,000 gallon tank loads of sulphuric acid into a section of the Crystal River, to clean out hydrilla. Where it was used, the acid did remove some of the hydrilla temporarily, however it also removed all of the flora, not to mention all of the fish in the treated areas. This procedure has sometimes been referred to as the Alka Seltzer Treatment. All of this in beautiful Citrus County, so well known for so many years as one of the best salt and fresh water fishing areas in the state. Fortunately because of either application problems or mechanical errors, the tests were discontinued. Later, someone started an underwater mowing project, where after periodic mowing, they managed to reseed and establish growth in most of the previously treated and uninfested areas.

Some time in the late Sixties, I believe when Bob Blackburn was President, which would have been 1967, the board of directors was discussing where the 1971 meeting would be held. A suggestion was made to hold it in Huntsville, Alabama, and a small number of directors felt that our Society was not yet ready to hold a meeting that far from the state of Florida. It was negatively argued that the nucleus of the Society was in Florida and might not be able to draw a sufficiently large group. However, that provincial attitude was overcome, and the meeting scheduled. To everyone's surprise, the Huntsville convention turned out to be the largest and one of the most successful ever held by this Society.

As with any young, struggling group, we had problems maintaining our solvency in these early years, and occasionally the Secretary/Treasurer had to be very innovative in order to handle all of the obligations of his office. Initially and continuing on for many years, the Boards' philosophy was that an interesting speaker was a strong attractant, and we have had more than our share of successful ones. The most unique speaker appeared at the 1972 meeting at New Orleans. The Secretary had secured the services of an unusual after-dinner actor-speaker by the name of Ray Baumel. Although he was a Florida Cracker, he was slightly dark complected, wore a mustache and could absolutely murder the kings' english, with his phony Spanish Accent. His specialty was to be publicized and announced as "His Excellency, the Honorable Marcelino Gonzalez," his title would depend upon whatever type of meeting it was all about. It might be Minister in charge of Weed and Water Control, Economics, or whatever was appropriate. Because of the advertising prior to the Ban-

quiet, it was always necessary to secrete him out of sight, until he appeared on the dais. Otherwise it might be a dead giveaway. All of this was done, of course, because everyone knew that you guys couldn't keep a secret in advance. Brandt Watson was President that year, so he knew what was going on. His wife, also seated at the head table next to the guest speaker, did not. Wayne, as Secretary of the Society was having a problem trying to find a way to prepay the speakers fee without the Board knowing the details. His fee for the evening was \$1,000, perhaps not much in today's world, but an awful amount for us in 1972. Finally a decision was made and Wayne submitted a voucher to the Board for approval listing Secretarial services by his Secretary. That's the way the Minister of whatever got paid that night. The most successful bit of entertainment the Society ever put on.

During the early 1970's a general topic of discussion at the Board meetings and among the members in general, was the importance of considering a name change. The Hyacinth Control Society had begun to realize that the name needed to describe more appropriately what the Society did and stood for, Consequently, after what could be

considered a bit of lobbying, the wheels were put into motion, and on January 1, 1976, we officially became THE AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT SOCIETY.

As I make this short reprise of our history, as meager as it may be, I am reminded of the enthusiasm of our group in their efforts for many years, to maintain the equilibrium of our Society, which is so unique, in any weed control field, aquatic or terrestrial. Our original thrust in the direction of operational research is more viable than ever, though possibly more difficult to maintain. What we needed then has not changed. It is still needed now, the requirement of maintaining our position as the most effective and instructive Society possible. The special interests of our members must be recognized, and a reflection of these interests in the form of papers presented, whether it be in the interests of operations, research or application. Let us not forget our original goals. For should we lose sight of where we have been, good or bad, we may lose sight of where we should be going.

I would like to close with an old Chinese proverb, which goes like this: I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.



Hyacinth Conveyor removing Hyacinths from the St. John's - 1940 (USACE)