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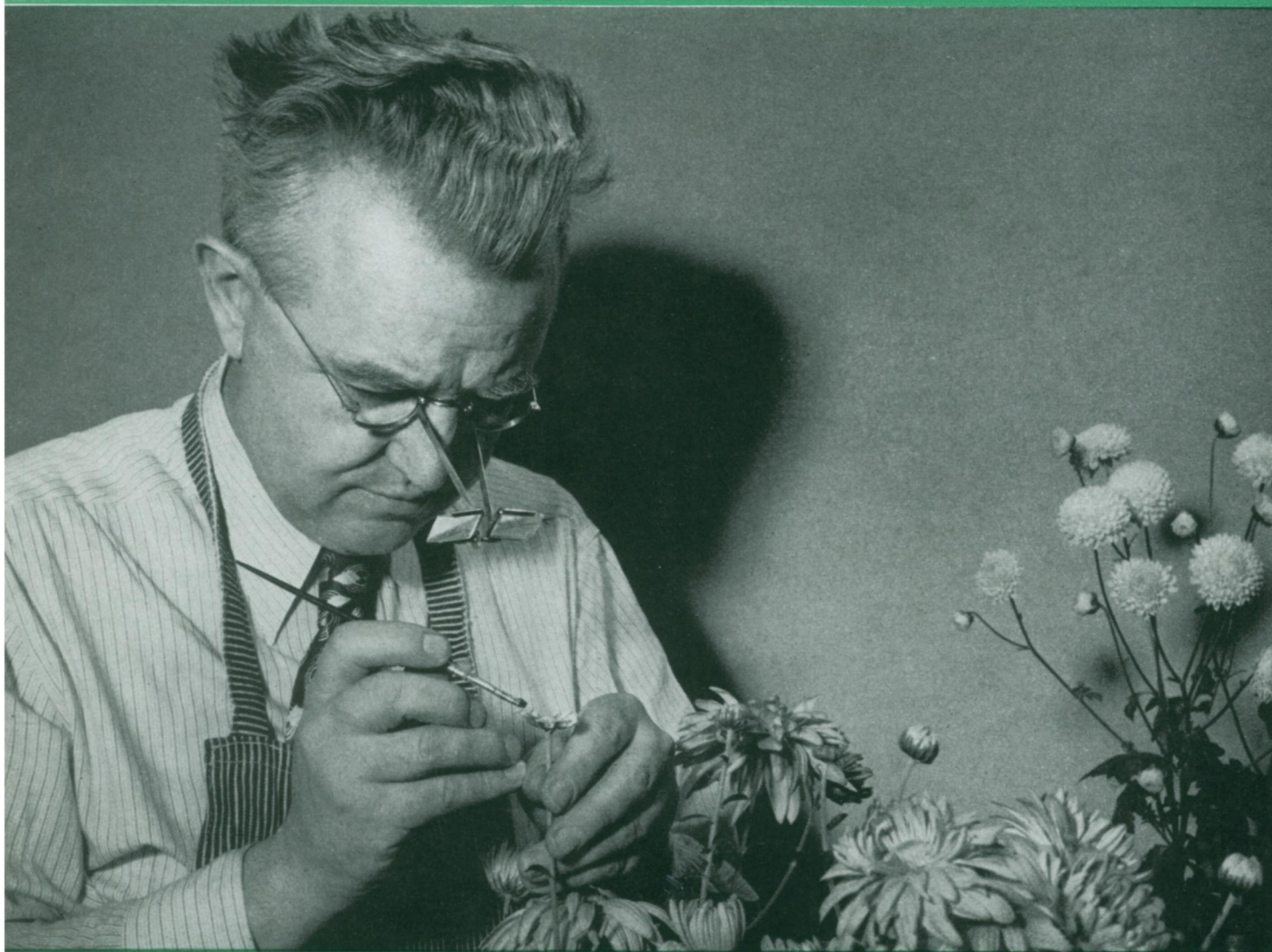


SCIENCE NEWS LETTER



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New Flower Faces

See Page 234

A SCIENCE SERVICE PUBLICATION

The battle of the atoms

Telephone equipment is constantly at war against invisible forces of nature which seek to take it apart, atom by atom. On all fronts, Bell Laboratories chemists must fight corrosion—an enemy able to make a telephone circuit noisy or perhaps to sever it altogether.

An example: for years lead cable had lain protected in wooden ducts. Then in certain areas something began to eat the sheath, exposing wires to moisture. Corrosion chemists of the Laboratories were called in. The corrosion, they found, came from acetic acid generated in the wood during the preservative treatment then in use. They pumped in neutralizing ammonia. Corrosion stopped. Now telephone duct wood is controlled for acidity.

In a large city, smoke-polluted air was coating the silver surfaces of contacts with sulphide. Noisy circuits resulted. Chemists discovered minute traces of sulphur vapor in the air. They filtered incoming air with activated charcoal. Today, the latest telephone contacts are of palladium—not affected by sulphur.

Corrosion in metals is only one type of deterioration which engages Bell chemists against hostile forces. Plastics, paper, metals, rubber, textiles, coils, waxes and woods all have enemies. But knowledge, and persistence, are steadily winning out—to the benefit of the telephone user.



A Bell Laboratories corrosion engineer examining samples during an exposure test on corrosion-resistant finishes and alloys.

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