

GENERAL SCIENCE

Closer to Foundation

➤ A DISTINGUISHED but highly informal club of scientists may have held its final meetings in Washington. At any rate, the "members" hope so.

They are the scientists who have been testifying before Congress on the need for a national science foundation. Since the end of the war, a parade of the nation's great in science and education has told committees of the House and Senate that they wanted the foundation.

A subcommittee of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee has been listening to testimony on the foundation. Among the science leaders who urged passage of a bill to set up the foundation is Dr. Karl T. Compton, chairman of the Research and Development Board of the National Military Establishment.

Back in 1945, he first told a Senate hearing that he was in "wholehearted support of the basic objectives" of the foundation.

Nearly all the witnesses who appeared at the hearings had, like Dr. Compton, appeared one or more times previously in the past four years to call for establishment of the foundation.

Virtually all the "big names" of American science, technology and education have told one or the other committees of Con-

gress since the war that they want to see the foundation start operating.

Most of them have had some suggestion to make about the organization of the foundation or its functions. But they have all told Congress that they want a foundation. In the last two years, they have added, the sooner the better.

The foundation would organize civilian, peacetime federal support of science under a new agency. The Senate this year passed a bill to start the foundation for the fourth time. Two previous bills died in the House, while President Truman killed one by a pocket veto.

Complicating matters for the House subcommittee which has been hearing the latest testimony of science leaders are eight bills—the one which passed the Senate and seven which have been introduced in the House.

However, most of the House bills differ only in detail with the Senate version. For this reason, plus administration support, scientists are hopeful that the foundation may be set up this year.

If and when it is, it will be a victory—after nearly four years—for a distinguished group of "lobbyists."

Science News Letter, April 16, 1949

ZOOLOGY

Color Change in Oysters

➤ RED oysters, instead of the usual pearl-gray ones, are not necessarily a cause for alarm. Such a color change occurred in oysters harvested from Maurice River Cove in New Jersey early last November. They looked as if they had been saturated with weak beet juice.

Buyers immediately began to shy away from these off-color oysters, and the New Jersey sea food industry might have suffered considerable financial loss, but scientific investigations proved that these red oysters were entirely wholesome despite their new color.

Dr. Thurlow C. Nelson, biologist at the Oyster Research Laboratory of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, looked into the records of the Fish and Wildlife Service and found that in 1931 there was an outbreak of red oysters in Chesapeake Bay, and that similar occurrences had been reported from Puget Sound, Washington. This was the first record, however, of the appearance of this condition in New Jersey, where the oyster has been studied for over 40 years.

In each case the outbreak of red colored oysters had been preceded by an extended period of unusual warmth in the fall. During this warm spell certain one-celled marine animals known as dinoflagellates

became very numerous. The oysters sucked them in for food as they do other one-celled organisms.

Dr. Nelson predicted that the red-color of oysters would disappear when cooler weather arrived. He was right. On Nov. 16, when the water temperature dropped to 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the dinoflagellates disappeared, and there were no more red oysters.

"The red color," he explained, "is caused by the red or orange-yellow pigments found in many plants. Known as carotene pigments, they are widely distributed in the food we eat; one of these pigments in carrots is the forerunner of vitamin A—so important in preventing night blindness."

To discover the exact nature of the red coloring, Dr. Harold H. Haskin of the zoology department of Rutgers University extracted several of the red oysters with alcohol and ether and obtained significant amounts of at least three plant pigments which normally occur in food.

The red color might also have been caused partly by the small, soft oyster crabs which live within the shell cavity of the oysters, Dr. Nelson stated. These small, soft oyster crabs are esteemed as a delicacy by sea food fanciers. A deep red pigment

is present in the eggs and in the crab in its formative stages. Dr. Nelson therefore advised the owners and operators of oyster shucking houses not to let crabs mix with the oyster pack during the breeding season of the crabs.

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MEDICINE

Medals Awarded Patients Who Live with Diabetes

➤ MEDALS are for medical heroes as well as those who fight well in wars.

To patients who fight well against diabetes, a disease that people can live with, Dr. Elliott P. Joslin, of Boston, leading authority on the disease, awards medals. He gives the medals in behalf of the advisory committee of the Diabetic Fund of the Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company.

One of these medals is not so rare as it was when it was first awarded. Over a thousand patients at the Joslin Clinic alone have earned this medal for living longer with diabetes than the life expectancy of those without the disease.

Today, Dr. Joslin's figures show, the life expectancy of the diabetic is three-fourths that of the ordinary individual. Less than a decade ago only two-thirds of the diabetics lived that long. Each patient who earns the medal helps others to get jobs and insurance despite their having the disease.

A new and more exclusive medal has been provided to honor those who have diabetes and who have lived 25 years or more and still are in perfect physical health, aside from their diabetic condition. So far only seven of these medals have been awarded, five to Joslin Clinic patients and one each to patients at the Mayo Clinic and in Dallas, Tex.

Just as patients formerly were more liable to tuberculosis if they had previously had diabetic coma, so now the facts show that they are more liable to arteriosclerosis, for the same reason. Recently, Dr. Joslin explains, Dr. Priscilla White of the Joslin Clinic has demonstrated that incapacitating arteriosclerosis is infinitely more common among those who have had attacks of coma in their previous history. It is not the coma itself but the fact that coma means treatment of the disease has been neglected.

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ENGINEERING

New Type Lighthouse Sends Radiobeacon Signals

➤ A NEW type of lighthouse to aid mariners approaching shore is in the making. The first of the type to be erected, now nearly ready for service, is situated on the breakwater of the Los Angeles harbor, of which Long Beach harbor is a part.

This lighthouse has the familiar flashing light, and a foghorn for use when needed.