

History of the Research Fund of the American Otological Society

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The Research Fund of the American Otological Society (AOS) has been funding basic and applied research in ear disorders since 1926. The conception and capitalization of this fund were the result of the efforts of a number of far-sighted leaders almost a century ago. The value of the fund is now about \$10 M. Each year grant proposals are critically reviewed by the Research Advisory Board of the American Otological Society Research Foundation. The Foundation funds meritorious research grants of about \$300,000 each year.

ORIGINS—1921–1926

The seeds of the Research Fund were planted by Dr. Norval H. Pierce at the annual meeting of AOS at the Hotel Chelsea in Atlantic City, New Jersey on June 1, 1921 and June 2, 1921 (Fig. 1). Dr. Pierce "...brought to the attention of the Society the need of doing something about otosclerosis." He moved that the president (Dr. Wells P. Eagleton) form a "Committee to consider the scope and plan an investigation of the subject of otosclerosis, to report at the next annual meeting of the Society." President Eagleton appointed "Doctors Wilson, Shambaugh, Cahill and Dwyer, with Dr. Pierce as Chairman."

At the May 1, 1922 to May 3, 1922 meeting of the AOS at the Hotel Raleigh, Washington, D.C., the Committee on Otosclerosis made its report. Dr. Pierce stated, "As the cause of otosclerosis is unknown and treatment futile...and for several other relevant reasons..." the Committee made five recommendations:

1. A systematic course of research into the subject with supervision of the AOS.
2. An endowment of \$100,000 should be procured to support research.
3. An experienced pathologist should be hired.

4. A working committee of the AOS "...is to collect specimens of otosclerosis from large institutions such as poor houses, public sanatoria, large hospitals...and to make the temporal bones available...to the center of investigation."
5. "The center shall be determined by the Society."

There was, evidently, lively debate at this meeting about the proposal. Some thought it to be a "...waste of time and money," while others thought that the sum of



FIG. 1. Photo of Norval H. Pierce.

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money was inadequate. It was suggested that some funds first be raised from otolaryngological societies to "...prove their sincerity..." and then approach the Rockefeller Foundation for further funding. Dr. Edward P. Dench felt that further study of human temporal bones "...won't get to first base any more than they have in the past." He suggested studies to find out "What makes the living cell tick will be the answer, plus chromosome analysis, and detection of chromosome aberrations." Evidently, no official action was taken by the Society, but the seeds were planted.

At the June 4, 1924 to June 6, 1924 meeting of the AOS in Washington, D.C., the subject of the study of otosclerosis was again brought up. Dr T. J. Harris, the secretary of the AOS, announced that dues were raised to \$25, of which \$10 were put into a fund to study otosclerosis. The fund at that time was \$1000. At that meeting, Dr. Arthur B. Duel (Fig. 2) presented a review of the subject of otosclerosis and proposed that a fund of \$500,000 be raised to support "...otological research for the eradication of otosclerosis." He suggested that the funds should be administered by "...some well-organized institution...to administer it in an effective way." Interestingly, he added, "A century from now eugenics may hold such sway that otosclerosis along with insanity, epilepsy and other transmissible defects may be wiped out." His



FIG. 2. Photo of Arthur B. Duel.

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CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

-of the-

AMERICAN OTOLOGICAL SOCIETY
INC.

Dated, June 3rd 1926.

NAME	PLACE OF RESIDENCE
Dr. Arthur B. Duel	74 East 65th Street, New York City.
Dr. E. W. Day	Westinghouse Bldg., Pittsburgh, Pa.
Dr. D. Harold Walker	2300 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Mass.
Dr. Eugene W. Crockett	489 Marlborough Street, Boston, Mass.
Dr. Thomas J. Harris	2104 West 40th Street, New York City.
Dr. John Gordon Wilson	2104 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.
Dr. Max A. Goldstein	3385 Ashmun Place, St. Louis, Missouri.

Arthur B. Duel
E. W. Day
D. Harold Walker
Eugene W. Crockett
Thomas J. Harris
John Gordon Wilson
Max A. Goldstein

FIG. 3. Image from the incorporation articles of the AOS 1926. AOS indicates American Otological Society.

recommendations were referred back to the Committee on Otosclerosis "...with power to act."

CAPITALIZATION—1926—1930

It seems that the fund began with seed funds from the membership of the AOS, the Triological Society and the New England Oto-laryngological Society (1). At the 1926 meeting of the Society, the Committee on Otosclerosis announced that the Carnegie Foundation granted "...a subsidy to the AOS for five years in the total amount of \$90,000." Interestingly, it was in 1925 that the New York Academy of Medicine Building in New York was being planned. The Academy received \$1.55 M from the Carnegie Foundation to build the Academy headquarters; Dr. Arthur Duel (Fig. 2) chaired the Building Committee of the Academy that year and probably had a strong relationship with the Carnegie Foundation just before its gift to the AOS. It was soon apparent that without incorporation the AOS could not receive the funds from the Carnegie Foundation prompting its incorporation on June 3, 1926 (2) (Fig. 3). This corpus was later supplemented by pledges, donations, and bequests. For example, it was noted in the 1929 proceedings of the Society that "Mr. Harkness will add \$100,000..." and Dr. Dench promised a "residuary estate estimated to be not less than \$50,000." Later, Mr. Starling W. Childs, one of the legal advisors of the AOS, contributed \$100,000 plus other funds as a "...large bequest." The committee also planned to raise that amount to \$500,000 for "...research pertaining to otosclerosis to include allied branches of medicine, scientific, clinical and economic as it relates to the ear."

IMPLEMENTATION—THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF RESEARCH

With the establishment of a research fund, a Committee on Otosclerosis, led by Dr. Norval Pierce was established on June 3, 1926. This committee was officially "...discharged and ceased to function..."

on May 19, 1930 when the function of the committee was assumed by the "Board of Trustees of the Research Fund." (3) However, between 1926 and 1930 there are records of both the Committee on Otosclerosis and the Board of Trustees meetings. While the Board of Trustees of the AOS replaced the Otosclerosis Committee in 1930, it was not until June 1, 1946 when the Board was made an official part of the AOS by an amendment to the Certificate of Incorporation. The Board's official name became "The Board of Trustees of the Research Fund of the American Otological Association, Inc." (1) I could find no record of the incorporation of this entity separate from the AOS, Inc. The amendment also stipulated that there would be seven members selected to serve as trustees and lay members could be appointed.

At the June 1924 meeting of the AOS Dr. Arthur B. Duel reported that the Committee on Otosclerosis established the Central Bureau of Research as a repository of records. It was formally established "for the translation of foreign literature and collection of case records and temporal bones." In 1927, without much explanation, Dr. Duel announced that headquarters were established for this research at the New York Academy of Medicine, 5th and 103rd St. New York. He called these headquarters "The Central Bureau of Research." Evidently, the Bureau was a small office staffed by a secretary/bookkeeper. On May 20, 1927 the office within the Academy was considered to be the "permanent home" of the Central Bureau. The office was overseen by Dr. Duel from its inception in 1926 until his death on April 11, 1936, when Dr. Edward P. Fowler of Columbia University took over and managed the Bureau until his death in 1967 (Fig. 4). The Central Bureau of Research was never a legally constituted entity but was the designation by the AOS of the secretarial office located at the NY Academy of Medicine. Interestingly, Dr. Fowler, in writing about the history of the Central Bureau in 1963, stated, the "Committee on Otosclerosis in 1924... melded into the Central Bureau of Research in 1926." Evidently, the Central Bureau ceased to function after 1967 at the time of Dr. Fowler's passing, but confusion about the use of this term continued and may be found in affidavits as late as 1979.

Although the Fund was originally designated to study otosclerosis, the purposes of the Fund seemed to be expanded from time to time. A Resolution related to the Central Bureau of Research from approximately 1930 stated that, "... funds for and in connection with the advancement, conduct, support, and encouragement of research in otology." The funds solicited at the onset of the program from the membership and the Carnegie Foundation were clearly directed toward the study of otosclerosis, but subsequent contributions did not seem to be so designated. For example, in 1956, the Fund received a contribution of \$36,000 from the estate of Mrs. Pricilla Pierce and in 1961 "...one quarter of the estate of George Edward Cohen" without specific stipulations.



FIG. 4. Photo of Edmund P. Fowler.

Some confusion arose at the April 30, 1928 meeting of the AOS about the nature and organization of the AOS research endeavors. A handwritten note at the top of the report of the meeting states, "This meeting is poorly reported." Dr. Pierce raised a concern that there were "efforts by members to utilize the funds for purposes other than that for which it was given..." The author of the minutes of that meeting referred to the "Committee on the Study of Progressive Deafness" (handwritten note "*otoscle*"(sic)), "Otosclerosis Committee," the "Scientific Committee," "Central Bureau of Research," The writer of the minutes of this meeting stated, "Who appointed what and when is not easily recognizable." Evidently, Dr. Pierce chaired the Committee on Otosclerosis and Dr. Duel ran the Central Bureau of Research at the New York Academy of Science. By 1928 it was reported that the Fund amounted to \$193,241 "...in pledges and cash..."

The research supported by the fund continued to flourish and award research grants throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The investigators funded were at various universities as well as the Central Bureau. Dr. Fowler served as the Treasurer during much of that time and the fund had grown to \$353,065.12 by 1944. A crisis occurred in the spring of 1944 necessitating a meeting of the Central Bureau of Research on June 4, 1944 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. As recorded in the

proceedings of that meeting, the secretary/bookkeeper, named as “Miss Taylor,” had died suddenly on November 26, 1943 leaving the Bureau and the Fund devoid of records including all books, records, bank statements, accountant’s reports (3). There were disbursements from April 1943 through June 1944 totaling \$3377.74 without any detail whatsoever. Dr. Fowler served as Treasurer but stated, “I was Treasurer in name only, I simply signed checks.” At that meeting Dr. Marvin F. Jones stated, “There is obviously somewhere a badness.”(sic) Since no records could be found after a thorough investigation, the committee concluded that this was “water over the dam” and that they must “. . .eliminate the opportunity of any such mistake occurring in the future.” The motion was made and passed. Chairman D. Harold Walker stated, “Later on we will discuss how to stop the damn thing.” Eventually, Dr. Fowler was able to account for all but \$2000.00. He concluded, “Some of this money is in no doubt absorbed by legitimate payments which were not properly recorded. . .” At this same meeting, Drs. Walker and Fowler discussed the confusion surrounding the name “Central Bureau of Research.” Neither knew where the name originated but they knew that it was not officially established or incorporated.

RESEARCH FUNDING

One of the initial endeavors of the Central Bureau of Research was to accumulate and publish an index of the literature on otosclerosis initially under the direction of Dr. Noval Pierce and Dr. Arthur Duel (4). For most of its existence, the Central Bureau was led by Dr. Edmund P. Fowler (5–11).

In spite of some bumps in the road, the research fund continued to grow and fund significant research. Numerous, influential otological researchers were funded by the Trustees over the years. For example, Dr. Georg von Bekesy of Harvard University (awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1961) was funded by the Research Fund for many years and was given the AOS Medal of Honor in 1957.

In 1957 there was consideration of hiring a full-time academician to perform otosclerosis research under the oversight of the Central Bureau. Catharine A. Smith was asked if she would agree to this position but she declined. Others were considered but the concept was dropped by the next year.

On May 18, 1963, Dr. Gordon Hoople suggested that the funds of the Central Bureau be sent to the Deafness Research Foundation. After discussion, the Executive Committee of the AOS was charged to “. . .look into this.” At the 1964 meeting of the AOS, Dr. Hoople withdrew his suggestion.

Before 1967, Dr. Edmund P Fowler “directed and managed” the fund. At that time the Board consisted of “small, self-perpetuating groups with not terms of office specified.” After Dr. Fowler’s death in 1967, Drs. Philip Melzer and Gordon Hoople reorganized the Board of the Research Fund to limit the tenure of Board members to

7 years with one new member rotating on each year. Additionally, the Board of Trustees ceased to fund projects initiated by the Board but instead fund only investigator initiated proposals (with some minor exceptions such as student travel awards). The Board of Trustees functioned as both a grant review committee (“Study Section” in NIH terminology) and a granting council (“National Council” in NIH terminology). Subsequently, the Board added consulting scientists to better review applications.

In 1985, the Board of Trustees recommended that in addition to research grants, a fellowship for young faculty members be established with a stipend of \$30,000 per year. The purpose of the research fellowship was “. . .to foster research in otosclerosis, other otologic disorders, and underlying processes. . .” However, only two applications were received between 1985 and 1989. At that time the stipend was increased to \$40,000 with an additional \$5,000 allowed for supplies. Applications for fellowship increased. The Board of the AOS Research Foundation changes these awards from time to time; currently the Foundation offers a Research Grant, a Fellowship Grant, a Clinical Investigation grant, and a Clinician/Scientist Award.

In 1989, The Board of Trustees of the Research Fund adopted an NIH style scoring system for grants: 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest. The Board and the Research Advisory Board have continued to use that method in evaluating proposals.

At the March 24, 1990 meeting of the Board of Trustees at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, the Trustees, Dr. Gregory Matz, Chairman, asked for clarification regarding “(1) What was the original intent of the contributors, Fund and (2) Should we expand the definition of research that may be funded?” As a result of this suggestion, the Board asked me (incoming Secretary-Treasurer) to organize a joint retreat on October 27, 1990 consisting of the members of the Council of the AOS and the Board of Trustees of the Research Fund to deliberate on the issues brought up by Chairman Matz. As a result of that meeting, and legal consultation with attorney Harvey Zimand of Kelley, Drye & Warren, the Board and the Council expanded the criteria for funding research grants and fellowships. Mr. Zimand pointed out that only the original funds (\$90,000) solicited from the Carnegie Foundation were restricted to otosclerosis research and those funds could be considered as spent. The Board, with the approval of the AOS Council could expand funding to any area of otological research and scholarly activity at their discretion. The following resolution was made by the joint committee and approved at the next annual meeting of the Society:

“Whereas the clinical problems associated with otosclerosis are not as prevalent as they were at the Initiation of the Research Fund of the American Otological Society, we resolve to broaden the responsibility of the Trustees of the Research Fund of the American Otological Society, to expend, grant or dispose of any part of its income or principle in

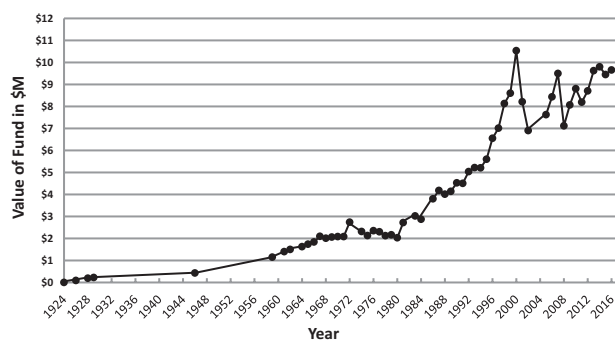


FIG. 5. The valuation of the American Otological Research Fund from inception. The changes in the value of the fund reflect variations in the equities markets and yearly withdrawals.

connection with the conduct, support and encouragement of research in otology.”

The corpus of the Fund has grown since its inception in about 1926 to be valued at almost \$10 M. The Board of Directors (Trustees) have awarded approximately \$4 M in research grants and fellowship awards (Fig. 5). The Fund has been invested wisely with long-term goals in mind to allow modest growth of the corpus and regular, annual support of meritorious research.

LEGAL STATUS OF THE ORGANIZATION

From the time of its inception in 1868, the AOS was unincorporated. To receive funds from the Carnegie Foundation, the Society was incorporated on June 16, 1926 in the State of New York (Fig. 3) (12). From that time until August 30, 2002, the AOS, Inc. operated as a “Domestic not-for-profit corporation” (at times called a “private foundation”) in the State of New York. Because of an unfavorable tax status, the corporation moved to Illinois and on August 30, 2002 and became a public charity, 501(c)(3) (13), under the designation “American Otological Society Education Foundation” (AOSEF) The educational and research funding was managed in this corporation until 2006. On June 19, 2006 the AOSEF moved to a new Illinois 501(c)(3) called the “American Otological Society, Inc.” Three days later on June 22, 2006, another new Illinois 501(c)(3) corporation was formed called the “American Otological Society Research Foundation” (AOSRF) (13). The corpus of the funds designated to support research in the AOS, Inc. were then transferred to the AOSRF where they reside today. The AOS Research Fund now operates under the guidance of the AOS, Inc (14). It established a Board of Directors (sometimes called the “Trustees of the AOS Research Fund”) who are the members of the Council of the AOS, Inc (15). The Board of the AOSRF appoints a “Research Advisory Board (RAB)” consisting of seven active members of the AOS with the addition of “. . . three otological researchers shall serve as consultants.” The function of the RAB is to review and prioritize requests for research or training activities.

CONCLUSION

The Research Fund of the American Otological Society is now valued at approximately \$10 M. Since its inception 90 years ago, over \$4 M in research and fellowship grants have been awarded while growing the corpus of the Fund. (Dr. Steven Telian, personal communication) It was the foresight, bold vision, and tenacity of Drs. Norval Pierce and Arthur Duel in the 1920s that began a research fund for otosclerosis through donations from members of the Society. The scope of the research supported has expanded to include other otological problems. The Fund has grown by early donations from Society members, the Carnegie Foundation and later gifts and bequests. Sound investment strategies have allowed the corpus of the Fund to grow while generously supporting otological research through grants and fellowships. Many of our careers were launched by seed grants from this Fund. In 1924, Dr. Duel said, “He who plants a tree, plants for posterity. May we plant a tree today which will become a boon to coming generations.” (16)

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