

An Executive Director for OSA

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Two important milestones in OSA's history—appointment of the Society's first executive director and the purchase of the headquarters building—are highlighted in this column.

In 1969, Jarus Quinn—a physicist specialized in spectroscopy—was hired to assist OSA Executive Secretary Mary Warga in administering the Society's affairs. Warga, a former professor of physics, was fast approaching retirement age and some members of the OSA Board of Directors wanted to provide her with assistance to help meet the demands of the rapidly growing Society. At the time he was hired as OSA's first executive director, Quinn, who had recently completed his doctorate in molecular spectroscopy at Catholic University, was working at the university as a researcher.

Initially Quinn took on routine chores such as scheduling meetings, which left Warga free to concentrate on ceremonies and other official functions, and to interact with the board. She also continued to write the monthly news column, "From the Executive Office," which had appeared in the Society's journal, JOSA, since 1960.

In 1972, Warga officially became executive secretary emeritus. Although she would continue to work part-time for several years more, at this point Quinn began to assume all the responsibilities of her former role. The earlier function of "OSA secretary"—which had become "OSA executive secretary" under Warga—became "executive director" under Quinn.

When it became necessary to relocate OSA headquarters—first to new rental quarters in 1974 and later to a permanent headquarters in a building owned by the Society—Quinn quickly acquired an understanding of areas that included real estate, zoning and fundraising. He also



Jarus Quinn, the Society's first executive director, poses on the steps of the Society's headquarters at 1816 Jefferson Place with the rest of the staff.

became the main point of contact with the American Institute of Physics (AIP), which had published JOSA for OSA since 1931.

When the first desktop computers appeared in the early 1970s, Quinn oversaw their integration into Executive Office functions. He quickly recognized that with computers, OSA staff could perform many of the functions that had historically been carried out by AIP. In 1975, under his auspices the Society launched *Optics News*, a quarterly magazine which quickly revealed itself an efficient mechanism for announcing meetings and distributing advance programs. This foray into magazine publishing persuaded members of the board that OSA staff could produce *Optics Letters*, the journal



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that was introduced in 1977, as well as JOSA in 1981, and then JOSA A and JOSA B, which were both launched in 1984. In 1989, copy-editing and manuscript processing of *Applied Optics*, the Society's largest journal, were brought under the auspices of OSA's Executive Office. By the early 1990s, only the

translation journals were still being published by AIP.

As additional functions were added, more employees and more space were needed. By 1991, the staff—which had totalled nine in 1978—had increased to nearly 80. There were specific departments focused on publications, meetings and even building maintenance, as well as groups working on advertising, exhibits, accounting and administration. Riding herd over all these activities kept Quinn a busy man. In 1989, the staff surprised him with a reception to mark his first twenty years as executive director. (This meant that his on-the-job tenure had now well surpassed that of the previous record-holder, Arthur Cobb Hardy of MIT, who had been OSA Secretary for 17 years in the 1940s and 1950s.) By the early 1990s, Jarus Quinn, the youthful successor to Mary Warga, was himself nearing the age of 60, and the board was beginning to ponder when and how to face up to the inevitable next transition.

A change in headquarters

Wallace Brode was very helpful in locating office space for OSA. Besides being editor of JOSA, he was active in the American Chemical Society (ACS), where he chaired the committee that was overseeing construction of ACS's new eight-story building at 16th and M Streets in downtown Washington. Brode arranged for OSA to occupy a temporary office in the old ACS facility; then, in January 1960, he arranged for the OSA executive secretary, the assistant secretary and an administrative aide to move into an office on the first floor of the new ACS building.

By mid-1967, when the ACS itself needed that space, OSA relocated to the offices of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on Pennsylvania Avenue. Seven years later, when NAS was expanding, OSA moved into a commercial office building at 2000 L Street. OSA had a five-

year lease, which was set to expire in 1979. In the year or two before that date, there were indications that rental costs in the district would increase sharply. By this time the Society had recovered from the grim recession years of 1970-72 and had finally built up invested reserves totalling \$805,000. The Board authorized the purchase of a building, and a search for suitable premises was begun.

1816 Jefferson Place

The building at 1816 Jefferson Place, purchased in 1979, would be the Society's home for the next ten years. In a prime location, just off Connecticut Avenue near Dupont Circle and only a block away from a subway stop, the building had at one time been two neighboring brownstone and brick residences, the ground floors of which were later converted into commercial shops and offices.

At the time of the purchase, it was still occupied in part, but the Society was able to move into most of the building and expand into the rest as various leases expired.

OSA was proud to have a home of its own: sketches or photographs of the building appeared in several issues of *Optics News*. On one occasion, Executive Director Jarus Quinn posed on the front steps with the entire staff of 15.

The Society now had a home and a mortgage, but was no longer required to pay rent. The next task for the board of directors and its finance committee was to devise a program to pay off the mortgage; how the Society met the challenge will be the topic of an upcoming column.

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