



## From the Editors

### Mature societies: Communication, journals and oral histories

Next year the Society will be seventy years old. The journal of the Society, now known as *Meteoritics and Planetary Science*, is only a few years younger. The journal is thriving, now being published monthly and attracting not only the best papers in meteorite research, but some of the most exciting work in the whole realm of planetary science and astrophysics. Society meetings are also going from strength to strength and attracting an ever-increasing breadth of exciting work. The Meteoritical Society is one of four learned societies sponsoring the National Research Council's Decadal Study of solar system exploration, being shoulder to shoulder with the mighty American Geophysical Union, the American Astronomical Society, and the Geological Society of America. It is a mature Society.

The Society has had to adapt to change as it has grown, and change always has the potential of being highly controversial. On one occasion the entire Council was replaced (Marvin, 1993). The Society's publication has also undergone many changes over the years, initially Society business and research was confined to a section of another journal, it became a separate publication in 1953 with four issues per year. In 1996, the journal assumed its present name to more accurately reflect the research it carries. Additionally, as the Society and the journal continue to mature, we are seeing the inevitable separation of Society business from research. The Society has many items of routine business and several important service items that it must communicate to its members. Currently these are published as supplements to *Meteoritics & Planetary Science*.

It is now time to make another change, emulating many other successful learned societies such as AGU, AAS, and GSA. It is time for the Meteoritical Society to create a second journal, *MetSoc*, to carry its business and service items. Items such as the Meteoritical Bulletin and meeting abstracts continue to expand and a separate dedicated publication would be appropriate. After four or five year's discussion by the editorial board, I am now proposing to the Society that we make the summer supplement and the President's winter newsletter an independent journal, published twice a year, with its own editor. *MetSoc* would contain the meeting abstracts, the Meteoritical Bulletin, discussions of Society business, updates of the constitution and guidelines for standing committees, and narrowly focused information papers for members (such as routine descriptions of new meteorites). Then the Meteoritical Society will be following the growth pattern of the AGU, AAS, and AGS who publish all their business and service items in journals that are separate entities from their primary research journals; *Eos* vs. *JGR*, the *Bulletin* vs. *Astronomical Journal*,

*GSA Today* vs. *Geology*. This also allows *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* to focus fully on primary refereed research; essential if the journal is to remain competitive.

Another benchmark in the growth of the Society was the decision of Council to commission a series of oral histories. The role of oral histories in historical research has a chequered history. At various times they have been regarded as the only truly authoritative way of recording events and their causes, and at other times they have been regarded with suspicion, as lacking the objectivity of the impersonal documentation. They are what they are, recollections by the individuals concerned of the evolution of ideas and events. Last year, as we watched our colleagues and leaders prepare to retire, one by one, we had the idea of asking them to place on record some of their memories of what had happened and why. We decided to publish a series of interviews. We presented the idea to council, and they provided the necessary resources. Ursula Marvin, who is probably unique in our community for her ability to prepare these interviews, accepted the assignment. She drew up a list using objective criteria. In the first instance it was to be people who were active in the field when the Space Age opened in 1957 and who have received the Leonard Medal or the Barringer Medal. Over the last year, she has taken a tape recorder to meetings, met with her colleagues in a quiet corner, and asked them to talk about their careers.

The second half of the twentieth century has been extraordinary for our field. From the work of the Noddacks, Goldschmidt, Prior and Merrill, and their like in the first half of the century, we have seen the field explode. We have seen meteorite specialists go from a handful of rather esoteric individuals to the established sample analysis community in NASA's science and engineering empire. We have seen the Cold War bring back lunar samples, we have found incredible new sources of meteorites, we have found meteorites from the Moon and Mars, and we have witnessed serious discussion of interstellar components in meteorites. We have seen members of our field become the designers of space missions, moving us to the very core of the scientific exploration of the solar system.

Ursula's efforts have again been impressive. To coax her interviewees to commit the time and then to open up to her knowing the results will be published, speaks highly of her skill and the trust they show her. It is a task that requires great sensitivity. From the outset we insisted that the interviews be science-based, we did not want anecdotes or material of a personal nature, neither did we want to create icons in our field. But we all know that science is practiced by humans, and is a very human pursuit. Drawing the line is a judgment call, and it is a tribute to Ursula and our interviewees that they have been sensitive to the journal's need to draw those lines.

So in this issue of *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* we publish the first four of a multi-year series of papers that are the oral histories of our subject. I thank Ursula for doing this, council for finding the resources, and, of course, our colleagues for sharing their memories and thoughts.

This issue also contains the last Meteoritical Bulletin to be edited by Jeff Grossman and, of course, the abstracts of the 2001 Annual meeting of the Meteoritical Society in Rome. Jeff gives us some parting thoughts in his own editorial. I am sure everyone who has ever worked on a meteorite appreciates Jeff's work and, especially, his success in moving the Bulletin from an annual publication to a standing electronic database. The annual meeting promises to be as exciting as we have come to expect and to reflect the new face of our subject as we get data from asteroids and comets to compare with our meteorite data. Some of us believe that many of the questions that for many years have kept us and our predecessors awake at night and coming into our laboratories at evening and weekends, will only be resolved when we get samples from asteroids and comets. This is surely going to happen in the next decade and we should now be preparing ourselves.

I am always impressed with the manner in which submitted abstracts are turned into a professional quality publication in such a short time. It is a lot of work requiring cooperation with a number of groups of people with differing duties and priorities. The authors write the abstracts, the Lunar and Planetary Institute receives, collates, and documents them, the Program Committee sifts through them and selects papers for the meeting, the LPI prepares them for publication and the journal office prepares the entire supplement issue for the printer. We have been very fortunate in the past in that the Lunar and Planetary Institute has formatted the abstracts as well as receiving them, but this year their other duties prevented this so the abstracts in this issue were formatted by the journal's Editorial Assistant, Henry Turner, whose duties were temporarily assumed by Rachel Brown, our summer intern. I am grateful to everyone, our colleagues in Rome who organized the meeting, and the *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* and LPI staff, for their cooperation in producing this issue. Most of all, I thank the authors of the abstracts for giving us a particularly trouble-free year.

Derek Sears  
Editor

## REFERENCES

- MARVIN U. B. (1993) The Meteoritical Society: 1933 to 1993. *Meteoritics* **28**, 261–314.