

The Beginnings of the Southeastern Microscopy Society.

W. Gray (Jay) Jerome

SEMS Historian

jay.jerome@Vanderbilt.Edu

I was pleased to see the article describing some of the history of the Florida Microscopy Society in a recent issue of *Microscopy Today*. I have since learned that many regional microscopy societies are busy not only archiving their history but retelling it to the next generation of microscopists. I think this is important. The Southeastern Microscopy Society (SEMS) has had a historian since its early days. I am the current historian and I view my job not just as someone who archives the records but also the one responsible for preserving the human face of our history. This includes telling our story. The Southeastern Microscopy Society's Newsletter, *The BEAM* (www.southeasternmicroscopy.org/beam/beam.html) has a regular history feature, where established microscopists recount interesting experiences in the laboratory, memorable SEMS' meetings, or other aspects of the personal side of science.

SEMS (www.southeasternmicroscopy.org) is a Local Affiliate Society (LAS) of both the Microscopy Society of America and the Microbeam Analysis Society. One of the strengths of the LAS networks is the sharing of information between regional microscopy societies. I strongly believe this should include our history, because the history of each of us defines part of the history of Microscopy. I find the telling of our stories rejuvenates the more senior of us and enlightens the junior microscopists earning their bones and moving up the ranks. In this regard, I accepted the urging of several to put down on paper the gist of a recent presentation I gave at our most recent SEMS meeting. What follows recounts the beginnings of SEMS. My beard is graying, but I am not old enough to remember this history first hand. I am indebted to past SEMS historians and other SEMS members who over the years provided the documents and reminiscences that went into composing this article. In particular, however, I borrowed heavily from the notes of Ben Spurlock, Gene Michaels, Danny Akin, Johnny Carson, Ray Hart, and Ivan Roth.

SEMS began life as the Southeast Electron Microscopy Society (S.E.E.M.S.). The organizational meeting was held on May 22, 1964 at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. In March of 1964, Dr. Anthony Kattine, then an Assistant Professor of Pathology at Emory, sent out

a letter to Universities and Colleges in the Southeast to draw interest in forming a regional organization for electron microscopists. Having received an enthusiastic response, Dr. Kattine announced that an organizational meeting would be held at Emory University on May 22 (Figure 1). The meeting was attended by almost fifty scientists from a five state area. It took place from 2:30-5:30 that day in the Woodruff Memorial Building of the School of Medicine. During the meeting, Dr. Kattine was elected Chairman, Mr. John Brown was elected Chairman-elect, and Mr. Ben Spurlock (Figure 2) was elected Secretary-Treasurer. Following the meeting, the attendees had a Dutch treat dinner in the Emory University Cafeteria.

The executive committee drafted a constitution and by-laws. Ben Spurlock sent out the minutes of the organizational meeting, the constitution and by-laws, and an announcement that the organization would meet three times a year with Atlanta as the "home base." Dues for the first year were \$3.00 for charter and regular members, \$20.00 for corporate members. On October 1, 1964 S.E.E.M.S. (note the periods between letters) reported 46 regular members, 4 corporate members, and a treasury of \$226. The purpose of the new society was stated as follows: "That a society should be formed to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information between people engaged in electron microscopy in this area".

On October 2, 1964 the first "official" meeting of SEEMS (note the lack of periods between letters) was held. The Woodruff Building at Emory was again the meeting site. The meeting featured a panel discussion on techniques, a real banquet (rather than the cafeteria) and an after dinner talk by Dr. Lucien Caro of Oak Ridge National Laboratories on "High Resolution Autoradiography." The second S.E.E.M.S. meeting (note the periods are back) took place on January 15-16, 1965 at the School of Medicine, University of Florida. There were 55 registrants. Among the talks was a demonstration of the new Carl Zeiss EM 9 Electron Microscope (Figure 3).

The third S.E.E.M.S. meeting was in the spring of 1965 and was held at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Among the talks presented was one by Ted Wilmarth (Figure 4), who was then at Oak Ridge National Laboratories. For the fourth meeting, James Reisner was asked to talk about the Radio Corporation of America's Electron Optics programs but had to decline because of health concerns. Many young microscopists do not realize that RCA once had a thriving business manufacturing electron microscopes. The program was headed up by James Hillier, one of the team members that developed the first North American Electron Microscope at the University of Toronto. RCA even developed a table top transmission Electron Microscope that they marketed to Junior Colleges and High Schools.

SEEMS grew steadily. By 1970 there were almost 200 members and over 500 members by 1980. Despite having a membership that is pretty sure of itself, we never quite solidified our identity. Various documents identified us as S.E.E.M.S or SEEMS, Southeast, South East, or South Eastern. However, in 1986 we reincorporated as the Southeastern Electron Microscopy Society and our leader became the President rather than Chairman. Although this added some clarity to our name, it also coincided with the realization that we had not filed a tax return for 10 years. Some pundits suggest the name change was a mechanism for skirting under the IRS radar. In



Figure 1. Original letter sent to prospective electron microscopists in the southeast announcing organization meeting for a microscopy society in the south east United States.

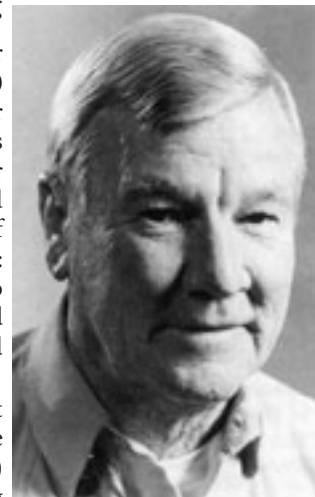


Figure 2. Ben Spurlock, circa 1980.



Figure 3. Ted Wilmarth and JoAn Hudson, circa 1990.

1992 we dropped the "Electron" from our name. Since we were back in the IRS's good graces by then, the name change was assuredly to recognize the growing impact other forms of microscopy were making on scientific inquiry. Although we are now SEMS, we maintain our connection to the past

by pronouncing our name with a long, southern "E."

Another important milestone in our history was the introduction in 1972 of the RUSKA AWARD. The RUSKA is one of our highest honors and it is given to the most outstanding paper presented by a student at our annual meeting. Competition for the award is fierce because the quality of our student presentations is high. The list of past RUSKA winners includes many prominent microscopists. The AWARD honors Ernst and Helmut Ruska who were instrumental in the design and use of early electron microscopes. Ernst Ruska, along with Max Knoll's, design a magnetic lens that was incorporated into the first electron microscopes to provide better than 10 nm resolution and Helmut Ruska was one of the first scientists to study bio-

logical samples by electron microscopy. One past SEEMS historian, Ivan Roth, took great pride in pointing out that SEEMS honored the Ruskas 14 years before the Nobel Prize committee bestowed the physics prize on Ernst Ruska in 1986 and 17 years before EMSA (now MSA) initiated their own Ruska award (they have since dropped the award). The SEEMS award was originally proposed to honor Ernst Ruska but when the society queried Professor Ruska for permission to use his name, he insisted the award honor his brother Helmut as well. Given the contributions of both to the field of microscopy and Helmut's contributions to biological electron microscopy, it is an extra honor that the award includes Helmut Ruska.

Over the years much has changed but much has stayed the same. SEMS remains a vibrant exciting Society providing information, education, and camaraderie among microscopists in the Southeast. If you are in the south in May, you are welcome to attend a SEMS meeting. If you are not a member of a regional microscopy society, I would encourage you to seek one out and begin to attend their meetings. There is a wealth of knowledge and a lot of fun to be had through membership. Contact information for regional Microscopy Societies in the United States that are associated with the Microscopy Society of American or the Microbeam Analysis Society can be found at their web sites, www.msa.microscopy.org or www.microprobe.org, respectively. Contact information about regional and national microscopy societies outside of the United States can be found through the International Federation of Societies for Microscopy web site at www.ifsm.umn.edu. ■

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