

NAEC History and Commentary

JOHN M. LAWRENCE

Echinoderm researchers from around the world gathered at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, in 1972 for the first International Echinoderm Conference. Participants at this meeting recommended that the international meeting be held every 3 years and that regional meetings be held in the intervening years.

Although meetings have been held regularly in Europe since 1979, it was not until 1989 that the first North American Meeting was held as the Friends of Echinoderms at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab on the Alabama gulf coast. The meeting was organized by James McClintock, Stephen Watts, and Tom Hopkins. I remember very well talking with Tom Ebert and Malcolm Telford on the beach. Steve Stancyk and his crew of brittle star people were there.

The second Friends of Echinoderms meeting was in 1992 at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. It was organized by Craig Young, Sid Bosch, and myself. I brought a number of tins of canned sea urchin roe from

Chile, but there were not many takers. Sid was disgusted that I had not brought Chilean wine instead. Dan Blake commented to Fred Hotchkiss and me that he did not recognize 50% of the persons there. I told him that was because 50% were younger than 50.

Because some university administrators did not think a "Friends" meeting could have academic and scientific respectability, the title of the third meeting was changed to the North American Echinoderms Meeting. It was held in 1998 at the Wallops Island Marine Science Center in Virginia and was organized by Thomas Klinger. I was particularly impressed with the participation of many graduate students, such as Emily Knott, Anne Boettger, Kristina Wasson, Christopher Mah, Ana Christensen, Nature McGinn, and Sophie Hill. At the other end of the generation span, Robert Hill talked about degenerating cucumber walls, and John Ferguson discussed fluid balance. Rebecca Ferguson, John's wife, talked with Bob and found

she had been a student at the University of Maine when he was an instructor there.

Over the years, these meetings have served a useful purpose by allowing echinoderm biologists from a wide array of disciplines to come together in an informal way to become acquainted with each other and each other's work. The interaction between graduate stu-

dents and established investigators has been particularly valuable. The 2001 NAEC Conference will certainly continue this tradition.

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA,
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33620.