

# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In the annual reports written after the first year of tenure of all the previous Directors of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and its two parent organizations, particularly the Biological Laboratory that existed here from 1890 to 1963, the central concern and topic of discussion was the precarious financial status of the Laboratory. Although I do not wish to appear overconfident in the current climate of tremendous national debt and cuts in science budgets, I am happy that I was appointed Director when finances were more secure than in previous eras. Through the efforts of John Cairns, who nurtured the newly reorganized Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory through its first precarious years in the 1960s, and particularly through the extraordinary efforts of Jim Watson during the last 25 years in redirecting the science, securing an endowment, and expanding the facilities, the status of the Laboratory's finances and infrastructure now parallels its outstanding history. We must owe a great debt of gratitude to Jim Watson for the marvelous renaissance the Laboratory has gone through during his years as Director, and we must be equally pleased that he continues his love affair with Cold Spring Harbor as the Laboratory's first President. As President, Jim continues to make his mark in the scientific arena by working for the continued success of the many facets of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and for the scientific enterprise in general. It is certainly my privilege and pleasure to work with him.

Many have asked me why I have taken on what appears to be a huge administrative task while still trying to run a laboratory to study the replication of DNA. I believe that this field of research is in the middle of its own renaissance and there is much to do that should be exciting and worthwhile. Moreover, as an active scientist, I can remain close to new developments that are constantly being presented. Thus, my science will remain a high priority. At the same time, however, having the opportunity to contribute to the Laboratory as Director is an equally exciting challenge and a privilege. There are many reasons one takes on what appears from the outside to be a considerable task, but the tremendous support from many people makes the challenge a pleasure.

The laboratory has long enjoyed vigorous and generous support from the local community. This support has in many instances throughout our history ensured the very existence and survival of the institution. It is quite common for members of the local community to take a keen interest in our scientific achievements; to get to know the students, postdoctoral fellows, and the staff; and to favor us with encouragement. Unfailing support also comes from the Laboratory Board of Trustees, perhaps one of the most 'hands on' Boards of any like institution. They enthusiastically work to ensure future success at the Laboratory, and their marvelous efforts have certainly given me the confidence to pursue what others may deem to be risky science. This confidence also comes from seeing Jim Watson in action, since he has initiated new areas of research at Cold Spring Harbor against the advice of more conservative scientists. This is what Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory should be about. I also am fortunate to receive help from the newly appointed Assistant Director, Winship Herr, and from a lean administration under Morgan Browne that thankfully minimizes bureaucracy and is remarkably efficient. With all this support, it will be much easier to think about those critical issues that will be im-

portant for our continued strength. Like so many scientists, I first came to Cold Spring Harbor while a graduate student to present my thesis research at a meeting. The meeting was the 1978 Symposium on DNA replication and recombination, and there I had the opportunity to absorb an entire week of outstanding science, meet the leading scientists in the field, and see firsthand the impact Cold Spring Harbor meetings have on science throughout the world. It was a memorable experience and it made me realize the importance of a strong meetings program.

Science at Cold Spring Harbor began following the establishment of a research station that hosted scientists who then had the luxury of a summer without distraction. These researchers came to this lovely setting to pursue research and interact with others of their ilk. This naturally led to the summer courses and later to the scientific meetings which today are one of the most important and unique features of the Laboratory. Both the larger scientific meetings on the main Laboratory campus and the smaller meetings at the beautiful "biological think tank" at Banbury on the other side of the harbor serve the scientific community as a whole and keep us in touch with the latest developments. This aspect of our enterprise is certainly key to our future as a leading research institution, for it is the meetings program that allows us to see firsthand the best young people and provides the scientists here enormous exposure to the scientific community as a whole. Similarly, our laboratory courses, now expanded successfully beyond the summer months, are key to our future success as an educational institution. Not only do the courses serve the needs of the scientific community as a whole, but they also broaden our intellectual makeup in a unique way. So often good science, both here and elsewhere, has emanated from discussions among participants at our meetings and courses. Important for the continued success of our academic program is the ability to provide sufficient temporary "on-site" housing for our visitors so that they can optimally benefit from the Cold Spring Harbor meeting experience. We have certainly progressed from the days of tents on Blackford lawn, a feature of the meetings not so long ago.

Equally important for our educational program is the DNA Learning Center in the village of Cold Spring Harbor. This advanced teaching laboratory aims to educate the next generation in matters relating to DNA and modern biology. As the use of DNA and genetics has an increasing impact in society, the general public has to be more aware of the huge advantages, and the potential pitfalls, of the technology. This can only come from education at an early age, and therefore the programs at the DNA Learning Center must continue to grow to meet these challenges. A steady source of funding for these programs is essential, but unfortunately, such funding is perhaps harder to obtain than research support.

Nine months after attending the 1978 Symposium, I returned to the Laboratory as a Postdoctoral Fellow to experience another aspect of Cold Spring Harbor. I initially intended to stay for just two years, the duration of my Damon Runyon-Walter Winchell Fellowship, but this is such a marvelous place to do science that I simply could not say no when the opportunity arose to join the staff and stay a little longer. The laboratory then was a powerhouse for innovative research, and I learned a style of science that has served me well over the years.

It is remarkable that throughout the laboratory's entire history, the quality of science accomplished here has been outstanding, and this was particularly so over the last quarter of a century. It is striking that much of this success has come from scientists who were (or are) in the formative stages of their careers. Such young scientists come here and enjoy the luxury of focusing on research without the burden of distractions so often

found at other institutions. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory should be a place where first-rate science is the priority and where the individual feels emboldened to achieve the best. This is an atmosphere that we must strive to maintain by continuing to offer young scientists the necessary encouragement, resources, and help needed for excellence. Of course a large part of this is to secure sufficient funds so that newly appointed investigators can jump head first into their research projects while they attempt to attract grant support that will sustain them in the long run. In today's climate of intense competition for ever-diminishing federal research funds, it is becoming more difficult to sustain our successful and established investigators, let alone to support new endeavors. But it is these new endeavors and the young investigators that will keep the institution vibrant. Thus, to remain at the forefront of research, we must maintain a healthy balance of outstanding, established investigators and newer bright young people, both of whom continue to break new ground.

This principle should also apply to the entire scientific community as we decide where to allocate funds for peer-reviewed research. The peer-review system that has served this country so well in the past is in danger of hindering scientific progress if review panels fund only the obvious and incremental science and shy away from the bold new approaches that may have a lower probability of success. It is often difficult to convince colleagues on review panels to take a chance on an untested idea or new approach when only one quarter to one tenth of the research grant applications to the National Institutes of Health receive funding. Moreover, it is all too easy to criticize innovative ideas compared to the ordinary and obvious. Although the task of deciding where to allocate limited funds is increasingly difficult, peer reviewers should recognize that new ideas and research directions must be given a chance if our science is to remain vigorous. Senior investigators who have benefited from such support in the past should work to keep these valuable goals alive.

As I look to the future of research at Cold Spring Harbor and to science in general, I am sure that we will not be immune to the financial pressures that have so concerned previous Directors. But at the same time, we can be proud of our past and look to an exciting future with the hope that great science will be self-sustaining.

*May 15, 1995*

**Bruce Stillman**