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# Presidents of the Washington Academy of Sciences

## A Historical Perspective for the Quasquicentennial

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### Abstract

A compilation of the presidents of the Washington Academy of Sciences (WAS) is presented for the quasquicentennial. More details are provided for a few presidents. Pointers to articles chronicling key events, presidential addresses, annual awardees and information about the Academy in the past quarter-century are included.

### Background

**FOR THE 125<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY** (quasquicentennial) of the Washington Academy of Sciences (WAS) in 2023, I compiled a history of the past WAS presidents. As I put this article together, I am reminded of the years that I worked at The National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in the Space History department as a Research Associate. While one can comb through a massive amount of paper and scanned copies for facts and data, it is usually the stories from the people who worked and lived in that era that make everything come to life. In terms of space history, I learned the most in the shortest period from astronaut Dr. Bonnie Dunbar. Additionally, I spent many enjoyable hours learning about and exploring our past with Dr. Valerie Neal, a career space historian. What I gleaned from this experience is that being correct is important, but I also came to appreciate the value in pulling together history to bring a fresh perspective on the future. In this vein, I have attempted to capture some of WAS' presidential history through tables, images, and references - and the stories that past and present members were willing to provide.

### The Early Years of the Washington Academy of Sciences (WAS)

The first president of the Academy was James (John) R. Eastman of the U.S. Naval Observatory (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The second president, Charles D. Walcott (Figure 2) who held the position for over a decade, was an American paleontologist, a former director of the United States Geological Survey and administrator of the Smithsonian Institution. Ellis L. Yochelson cap-



Figure 1: 1898 James R. Eastman, 1<sup>st</sup> President of WAS  
(Photo credit: Ref. 8)

tured his biography in the book, Charles Doolittle Walcott, Paleontologist.<sup>2</sup> The third president of WAS, Frank W. Clarke, called the “Father of Geochemistry” is credited with determining the composition of the Earth’s crust (Figure 3). For the next several decades, the presidency continued to change annually (Table 1).

### **Diversification Started in 1955**

Dr. Margaret Pittman was the first female president of the Academy in 1955 (Table 2, Figure 4). She was a pioneering bacteriologist who conducted research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Subsequently, in 1957, she was named Chief of the Laboratory of Bacterial Products – she was the first woman to lead a NIH laboratory. Dr. Pittman was a key NIH participant in developing standards for cholera vaccine in the Southeast Asia in a region that is now Bangladesh.



Figure 2: 1899-1910 Charles Doolittle Walcott, 2<sup>nd</sup> President of WAS  
(Photo credit: Ref. 9)

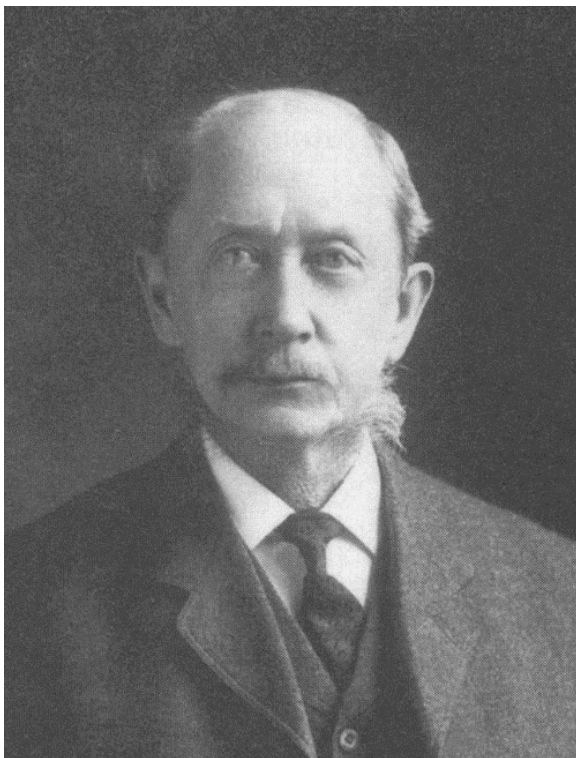


Figure 3: 1911 Frank Wigglesworth Clarke, 3<sup>rd</sup> President of WAS  
(Photo credit: Ref. 10)



Figure 4: Margaret Pittman, President of WAS in 1955  
(Photo credit: Ref. 11)



Figure 5: Mary Louise Robbins, President of WAS 1971-1972  
(Photo credit: Ref. 4)

Mary Louise Robbins was the second female president of WAS. She served as president from 1971 to 1972 (Table 3, Figure 5). She was a Professor in the Department of Microbiology in School of Medicine at George Washington University. She received a WAS Special Award for excellence and dedication to teaching as well as meritorious public service to science in the Washington area in 1977.<sup>4</sup> Under her leadership, the Academy held an important symposium entitled, “The Fate of the Chesapeake Bay”.<sup>5</sup> Robbins retired to Japan where she volunteered in a program to help Japanese scientists write their research findings in English for publication in English language journals. She was much loved by her students and friends in Japan, as well as the United States.



Figure 6: John G. Honig, President of WAS 1981-1982  
(Photo credit: Ref. 12)

In the next decade, John G. Honig (Figure 6) became president. He was born in 1923 in Austria.<sup>7</sup> Following Hitler's invasion of Austria, he fled to London alone, at the age of 15. Later, in 1940, he came to New York City with his parents and then moved to D.C. in 1949. He recently departed this world in 2020 at the age of 96 after a long and successful career. Honig was a physical chemist with the former National Institute of Cleaning and Dyeing and with the Naval Research Laboratory as well as several defense agencies.

In the decade after, Frank Rawle Haig, S.J. (Figure 7) became president. He is an American Jesuit priest, physicist, and academic administrator. He is also the younger brother of Alexander Haig, who served as the United States Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan from 1981 until 1982, and he gave generously to WAS and its mission.

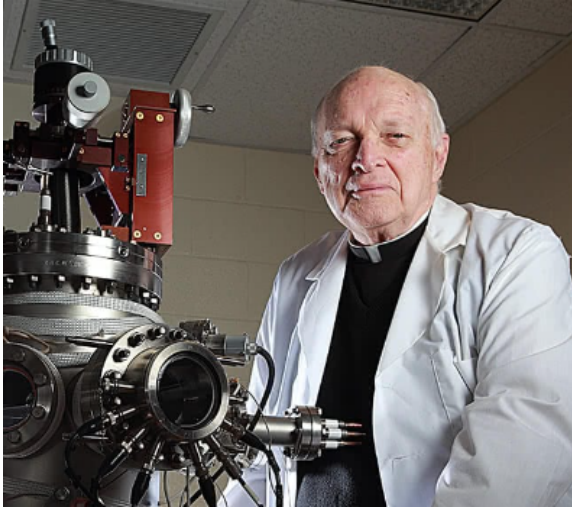


Figure 7: Frank Rawle Haig, S.J., President of WAS 1995-1996  
(Photo credit: David Rehor)

### **The Centennial Period**

Rita R. Colwell is Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland at College Park and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and President of CosmosID, Inc. As an American microbiologist, her interests are focused on global infectious diseases, water, and health. She has authored or co-authored 20 books and more than 800 scientific publications. Colwell was elected WAS President (for 1996-1997) (Figure 8) after having served as President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). She then agreed to serve a second consecutive term as President (1997-1998), further showing her dedication to the Academy, after the President-Elect (Benjamin H. Alexander) unexpectedly passed away.<sup>i</sup> During her terms as President of the WAS, Colwell organized a series of seminars focused on local area research programs and workshops for young scientists of the region.

Michael P. Cohen was President of the Academy from 2003 to 2004 (Figure 9) when he was the Assistant Director for Survey Programs at the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics. During Cohen's term as President, the Academy organized and held its highly successful first Capital Science Conference. Cohen is now a Principal Statistician at the American Institutes for Research. Cohen continues to serve on the Board as the





Figure 8: Rita R. Colwell, President of WAS 1996-1998  
(Photo credit: R. R. Colwell)



Figure 9: Michael P. Cohen, President of WAS 2003-2004  
(Photo credit: M. P. Cohen)

Representative of the Washington Statistical Society.

Peg Kay was President of Vertech, Inc. a telecommunications consulting company. She served as President (2004-2005) and later as Executive Director of WAS (Figure 10). She organized five biennial Capital Science conferences, nine Annual Awards ceremonies, and managed much of the ongoing work of the Academy.

### **Recent Years**

The most recent years, since 2000, indicate annual changes in the presidency (Table 4). Sue Cross served as President from 2017 to 2018. Cross' focus was communication, outreach to students, strengthening the Academy's connection with Affiliated Societies, expansion in the biomedical field, and recognition of scientists. Judy Staveley (Figure 11) served as



Figure 10: Peg Kay, President of WAS 2004-2005 (Photo credit: WAS)

President from 2019 to 2020 while being a Program Manager contractor for the U.S. Air Force. During Dr. Staveley's term as President, she organized and held online virtual scholarly lectures during the 2020 pandemic, held mentoring sessions for science students, and attended national speaking engagements to promote the Academy. Additionally, she was an honorable speaker on behalf of the Academy on Capitol Hill for the S-STEM symposium hosted by AAAS and the National Science Foundation to speak on science mentorship, retaining underrepresented students in sciences, and creating pathways to an inclusive workforce. She continues to serve WAS as a Member at Large Board Member.

Mina Izadjoo (Figure 12) served as President three times, 2015 to 2016, 2018 to 2019, and most recently from 2021 to 2022. As such, she is the second longest serving President next to Walcott. Izadjoo continues to serve on the Board as a Member at Large.

Ram Sriram (Figure 13) is the immediate past president, with his tenure as President from 2021 to 2022. He is credited with championing WAS membership for non-residents, i.e., scientists living outside the capital



Figure 11: Judy Staveley, President of WAS 2019-2020  
(Photo credit: J. Staveley)



Figure 12: Mina Izadjoo, President of WAS 2015-2016, 2018-2019, and 2021-2022 (Photo credit: WAS)



Figure 13: Ram Sriram, President of WAS 2021-2022  
(Photo credit: WAS)

region. He recruited a new journal editor, Ken Baclawski (when the previous editor stepped down after 20 years of service). Additionally, Sriram oversaw the negotiations and office move within the AAAS building.

After Sriram, I became the next president. My key connections to the Academy were recognition with a WAS Leadership in Science Award (in 2018) and subsequently serving as Secretary of WAS (in 2018 through 2019). However, the past presidents directly laid the groundwork for my term. As I reflect on the first half of my presidency, change comes to mind since WAS now has six new board members. Additionally, the board has worked together to update and modernize some of the board basics (registration, finances, procedures, communications and revision to bylaws). In a few months, I will pass the gavel to Mahesh Mani, and I am confident that he will do a great job contributing further to WAS' mission.

### **Relevant Journal Articles in Last Quarter-century**

Regularly issues of Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences include information about WAS events, people, and their strategies. A sampling of such articles is presented mostly for the past 25 years:



Figure 14: Lynnette D. Madsen, President of WAS 2022-2023  
(Photo credit: E. B. Svedberg)

## Before 1998

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Past Presidents of the Washington Academy of Sciences</li> </ul>	Vol. 82, No. 4, December, 1992
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Washington Academy of Sciences: Background, Origin, and Early Years</li> </ul>	Vol. 84, No. 4, December, 1996
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President's Report</li> </ul>	Vol. 85, No. 3, December, 1998
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Centennial Issues</li> </ul>	Vol. 85, No. 2, December, 1998 Vol. 85, No. 1, December, 1998
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centennial Celebration Symposium Issue</li> </ul>	Vol. 87, No. 1/4, October, 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Junior Academy "STARS" Program</li> </ul>	Vol. 88, No. 2, June, 2002

## 2003-2007

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where Science is Headed – Sixteen Trends: Presented at the Meeting of the Affiliated Societies of the Washington Academy of Sciences</li> </ul>	Vol. 89, No. 3/4, Fall/Winter, 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Change in Editorship</li> </ul>	Vol. 89, No. 1/2, Spring/Summer, 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential Message; Capital Science</li> <li>• Surrounded By Science – Growing Up In The Nation's Capital</li> <li>• Science Before and After September 11</li> </ul>	Vol. 90, No. 2, Summer 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report of The Nanotechnology Forum of The Washington Academy of Sciences</li> <li>• How The Washington Academy of Sciences Helps Its Members Participate in The City's Science Community</li> </ul>	Vol. 91, No. 4, Winter 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential Message</li> <li>• The Role of Academies of Science in the Critical Examination of New Ideas: Looking at Gaia</li> </ul>	Vol. 92, No. 2, Summer 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Has No Gender – The History of Women in Science</li> <li>• Presidential Remarks</li> </ul>	Vol. 93, No. 1, Spring 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Awards</li> </ul>	Vol. 93, No. 2, Summer 2007



## 2008-2012

• Thank God For The Journal Of The Academy! Scientific Publications During World War II	Vol. 94, No. 3, Fall 2008
• Presidential Remarks, Capital Science, Annual Awards	Vol. 94, No. 2, Summer 2008
• Science Policy	Vol. 95, No. 3, Fall 2009
• Presidential Remarks, Annual Banquet	Vol. 95, No. 2, Summer 2009
• Science is Murder, Capital Science	Vol. 96, No. 1, Spring 2010
• Banquet and Presidential Remarks	Vol. 96, No. 2, Summer 2010
• Science Is Murder	Vol. 97, No. 1, Spring 2011
• Outgoing President's Remarks; Annual Awards	Vol. 97, No. 2, Summer 2011
• Dedicatory Gift for the Washington Academy of Sciences	Vol. 97, No. 3, Fall 2011
• Presidential Remarks & Annual Awards	Vol. 98, No. 2, Summer 2012

## 2013-2017

• Presidential Remarks, Board Members	Vol. 99, No. 1, Spring 2013
• Annual Awards	Vol. 99, No. 3, Fall 2013
• Past President Dr. John H. Proctor (1931 – 2013)	Vol. 99, No. 4, Winter 2013
• Annual Awards	Vol. 100, No. 2, Summer 2014
• Annual Awards	Vol. 101, No. 1, Spring 2015
• The Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences joins the JSTOR Archive	Vol. 101, No. 4, Winter 2015
• Messages from Presidents, Annual Awards	Vol. 102, No. 2, Summer 2016
• Annual Meeting and Awards Banquet	Vol. 103, No. 2, Summer 2017
• A Brief History of the WAS Junior Academy	Vol. 103, No. 4, Winter 2017

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 2018-2022

• Messages from Presidents, Annual Awards	Vol. 104, No. 2, Summer 2018
• Comments from the Vice President for Administrative Affairs	Vol. 104, No. 4, Winter 2018
• Annual Awards	Vol. 105, No. 2, Summer 2019
• Beyond the Classroom	Vol. 106, No. 1, Spring 2020
• Annual Awards, President Speeches	Vol. 106, No. 3, Fall 2020
• Annual Awards, President Speeches	Vol. 107, No. 3/4, Winter 2021
• James Filliben Obituary	Vol. 108, No. 2, Summer 2022
• Annual Awards, President Speeches	Vol. 108, No. 2, Summer 2022

### **Conclusions**

I am impressed with the Academy. WAS has had many remarkable leaders: attested by their independent historical records and accomplishments in science and/or in the policy-education landscape. WAS has recorded the thoughts of these leaders across many decades in their journal which has facilitated WAS' positive evolution. Moreover, the journal has embraced scientific research, communication and policy broadly allowing for expression of current thought and scholarship. All of these aspects bode well for WAS serving the community for another 125 years.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to many for making this historical compilation possible. First to the many editors of the Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences for their records, particularly Kenneth P. Baclawski. My appreciation also extends to Michael P. Cohen and Rita R. Colwell for sharing their stories, Paul Averson for keeping board minutes, and Mark Spradley for highlighting the need to celebrate the quasiquicentennial. I am also grateful to the past presidents who supplied their biographies and photographs. Lastly, I am thankful to Mahesh Mani for encouraging me to write this article and Sethanne Howard for hammering home that the journal is the archive of WAS and her helpful suggestions on this article.

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9. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 95. Negative No. 82-3143
10. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7099, Negative No. 97-1692
11. Margaret J. Pittman. Digital Commons @ RU. <https://bit.ly/3NoVERt>
12. John Honig. The Washington Post. <https://bit.ly/41hm39M>

Table 1: Presidents<sup>3</sup> in the Earliest Years

1898 James R. Eastman	1925 Vernon Kellogg
1899-1910 Charles D. Walcott*	1926 George Kimball Burgess*
1911 Frank W. Clarke*	1927 Alexander Wetmore*
1912 Frederick Vernon Coville*	1928 Robert B. Sosman
1913 Otto Hilgard Tittmann*	1929 Aleš Hrdlička*
1914 David White	1930 William Bowie*
1915 Robert Simpson Woodward*	1931 Nathan Cobb
1916 Leland Ossian Howard*	1932 Leason Heberling Adams*
1917 William Henry Holmes*	1933 Robert Fiske Griggs*
1918 Lyman James Briggs*	1934 Louis B. Tuckerman
1919 Frederick Leslie Ransome*	1935 George W. McCoy
1920 Carl L. Alsberg*	1936 Oscar Edward Meinzer*
1921 Alfred Hulse Brooks*	1937 Charles Thom*
1922 William Jackson Humphreys*	1938 Paul E. Howe
1923 Thomas Wayland Vaughan*	1939 Charles E. Chambliss
1924 Arthur I. Day	

\* Wikipedia entry

Table 2: Presidents<sup>3</sup> in the 40's, 50's and 60's

1940 Eugene C. Crittenden*	1956 Ralph E. Gibson
1941 Austin Hobart Clark*	1957 William M. Rubey
1942 Harvey L. Curtis	1958 Archibald T. McPherson
1943 Leland W. Parr	1959 Frank L. Campbell
1944 Clement L. Garner	1960 Lawrence A. Wood
1945 John E. Graf	1961 Philip Hauge Abelson*
1946 Hugh Latimer Dryden*	1962 & 1963 Benjamin D. Van Evera (double term)
1947 Waldo LaSalle Schmitt*	1964 François Naftali Frenkiel*
1948 Frederick Dominic Rossini*	1965 Leo Schubert
1949 F. H. H. Roberts, Jr.	1966 John K. Taylor
1950 Francis B. Silsbee	1967 & 1968 Heinz Specht (double term)
1951 Nathan R. Smith	1968-69 Malcolm Henderson
1952 Walter Ramberg	1969-70 George W. Irving, Jr.
1953 Frank M. Setzler	
1954 Francis M. Defandorf	
1955 Margaret Pittman*	

\* Wikipedia entry

Table 3: Presidents<sup>3</sup> in the 70's, 80's and 90's

1970-1971 Alphonse F. Forziati	1986-1987 Simon W. Strauss
1971-1972 Mary L. Robbins	1987-1988 Ronald W. Manderscheid
1972-1973 Richard K. Cook	1988-1989 James E. Spates
1973-1974 Grover C. Sherlin	1989-1990 Robert H. McCracken
1974-1975 Kurt H. Stern	1990-1991 Armand B. Weiss
1975-1976 George Abraham	1991-1992 Walter E. Boek
1976-1977 Florence H. Forziati	1992-1993 Stanley G. Leftwich
1977-1978 Richard H. Foote	1993-1994 John H. Proctor,
1978-1979 Mary H. Aldridge	1994-1995 Rev. Frank R. Haig, S.J.*
1979-1980 Alfred Weissler	1995-1996 John S. Toll*
1980-1981 Maijorie R. Townsend*	1996-1998 Rita R. Colwell* (double term)
1981-1982 John G. Honig	1998-1999 Cyrus R. Creveling
1982-1983 James F. Goff	1999-2000 Rex Klopfenstein
1983-1984 Jean K. Boek	
1984-1985 Ralph I. Cole	
1985-1986 John J. O'Hare	

\* Wikipedia entry

Table 4: Presidents from year 2000 onwards

2000-2001 W. Allen Barwick	2014-2015 Terrell Erickson
2001-2002 Jerome Gibbon	2015-2016 Mina Izadjoo
2002-2003 Marilyn R. London	2016-2017 Mike Coble
2003-2004 Michael P. Cohen	2017-2018 Sue Cross
2004-2005 Peg Kay	2018-2019 Mina Izadjoo (second time)
2005-2006 F. Douglas Witherspoon	2019-2020 Judy Staveley
2006-2007 William Boyer	2020-2021 Mina Izadjoo (third time)
2007-2008 Alain Touwaide	2021-2022 Ram Sriram
2008-2009 Albert H. Teich	2022-2023 Lynnette Madsen
2009-2010 Kiki Ikossi	2023-2024 Mahesh Mani (incoming president)
2010-2011 Mark Holland	
2011-2012 Gerard Christman	
2012-2013 Jim Cole	
2013-2014 Jim Egenrieder	

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**LYNNETTE D. MADSEN**, Ph.D., is a material scientist and engineer. She has published two books, three book chapters/sections, and more than 100 articles; been awarded three patents; and delivered more than 100 invited talks. She is a Fellow of the Washington Academy of Sciences, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Ceramic Society, American Vacuum Society, Materials Research Society and ASM International, and is a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. She currently serves on the Advisory Board for the Rosalind Franklin Society and editorial board for Materials Today. Dr. Madsen was recognized with a WAS Leadership in Science Award (2018) and subsequently served as Secretary of WAS (2018-2019) and President of WAS (2022).