AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. IRVING GERRING AND MR. MORRIS GRAFF

BY STEPHEN P. STRICKLAND, PH.D.

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY IN 1987 OF

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

and the

150TH YEAR IN 1986 OF

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE

D

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

Э

July 1986

# Table of Contents

Introduction	i
Morris Graff: Education and training	1
Becoming Executive Secretary to Endocrinology Study Section	1
Irving Gerring: Education and training	2
Becoming Executive Secretary of two early study sectins	4
Question of "models" for NIH study sections	4
Role of "Exec Sec's" in appointments	6
Authority for study sections	7
Program planning	9
Examples of outstanding scientists on study sections	11
Study sections and policy	12
Mr. Gerring's and Mr. Graff's curriculum vitae	14

 $\odot$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

٦)

# Introduction

This interview with Mr. Irving Gerring and Mr. Morris Graff is one in a series of "oral histories" focusing primarily on the origins and development of the extramural programs — most especially the grants programs of the National Institutes of Health, beginning with the establishment of the Division of Research Grants in 1946.

The conversations with Mr. Graff and Mr. Gerring are especially important to an understanding of how the grants program of NIH worked. These men, distinguished in their own fields, are among the most outstanding professionals to serve as Executive Secretaries of NIH study sections. Thus they provided mention, not elaborated in the other interviews in this series, regarding the actual operations of the study sections. If, as I have asserted, the grants program of NIH is the most far-reaching enterprise of the National Institutes of Health, then in turn the study sections must be seen as the central element of the grants program. It is, after all, the judgment by peers and experts that has been the hallmark of grants programs of NIH, admired universally and in some instances copied by other institutions and programs. Thus the quality of scientific judgment and professional dedication of executive secretaries of the study sections is key to the success of the larger endeavor.

Irving Gerring, a Connecticut native, received his Bachelor of Science degree in bacteriology and chemistry from the University of Connecticut in 1931. There followed a master's degree in public health from Columbia University in 1935, and additional graduate work in biology and public health at the University of Michigan. Mr. Gerring worked in environmental health for the city of Bridgeport and as a public health engineer in the U.S. Public Health Service before joining the commissioned core of that service in 1943. At the end of the war, he worked at the War Assets Administration, and in 1947 joined the National Institutes of Health as Science Administrator and Executive Secretary of study sections. In fact, Mr. Gerring set a record in the number of study sections he directed by a single individual, being in charge of eleven during the slightly more than 25 years he served at NIH.

),

0

 $\bigcirc$ 

Э

Morris Graff, whose B.A. is from New York University and whose Master of Science degree is from Tulane, worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Army before joining the National Institutes of Health in 1949. His first position at NIH was Chief Biochemist in the clinical research unit of the National Cancer Institute. In 1952 he transferred to the Endocrinology Branch of NCI at the Clinical Center in Bethesda and served in various administrative posts at the Cancer Chemotherapy Center thereafter. In 1961, he became Executive Secre- tary of the Endocrinology Study Section, continuing in that position until his retirement from NIH. In 1974, the Endocrine Society of the United States awarded Morris Graff the Ayerst Award for Distinguished Service. In the citation that accompanied that award, the Society said the following about what makes a good executive secretary:

The Executive Secretary of a study section has to be firm of purpose, with a disciplined sense of order, and inexhaustible physical vitality. The three rounds of meetings of study sections and councils each year are merely climaxes of an extensive continuing operation. The Executive Secretary . . . must not only cope with the enormous range of his subject but also bear with equanimity the additional tasks that an unusually enterprising study section puts upon him . . . to deal with the myriad details of innumerable research proposals and to handle, with dispatch and a minimum of error, the unending flow of requests.

The Society especially cited Mr. Graff for being "the investigator's advocate, confidant, sensible critic and friend . . discreet, wise, informed and candid." These requirements were not only met with distinction by Mr. Graff, and equally by Mr. Gerring, but typically by all the scores of men and women who have served as Executive Secretaries of study sections from the beginning of the NIH grants program to the present day.

 $\bigcirc$ 

7

STEPHEN P. STRICKLAND, PH.D. WASHINGTON, D.C.

Interview by Stephen P. Strickland with Mr. Morris Graff and Mr. Irving Gerring

July 1986

SS: I am speaking today with Mr. Morris Graff and Mr. Irving Gerring, both of whom were distinguished Executive Secretaries of NIH study sections. Gentlemen, I would first like to ask you about your personal backgrounds -- how you came to work for the NIH and what inspired you.

As far as my training goes, I actually never did get a high school diploma. MG: I started working at the Columbia University as a laboratory assistant. I went to five different high schools at night, and attended college at night. I attended Colubmia University, City College, and New York University, and graduated from NYU with a B.S. in 1939. I obtained an M.S. from Tulane in 1946. I was accepted as a graduate student at Columbia University's department of biochemistry, where I was a laboratory assistant to Professor Rudolph Schoenheimer, who initiated the use of stable isotopes in biological systems. I left to join the government in 1942 in New Orleans as a chemist in the Southern Regional Research Laboratories. From there I moved to the Army Chemical Center in Edgewood, Maryland for two years, then transferred to the Public Health Service hospitals. The National Institutes of Health set up what was supposed to be a pilot set of laboratories for their new Clinical Center in Baltimore. What was then the Marine Hospital is now the Public Health Service Hospital near The Johns Hopkins campus.

### SS: What year was that?

 $\supset$ 

 $\odot$ 

)

I operated a steroid chemistry laboratory in the Public MG: That was 1950. Health Service Hospital. There were eight laboratories in an annex building that had been converted from dormitories. They opened Building Ten, the big hospital here on the campus. When I transferred here they assigned me to a labora-That was kind of foreign to me, but Dr. Roy Hertz, an tory for electrolytes. endocrinologist who had one of the first patients in the new Clinical Center at NIH employed me to run his steroid labs. I believe those were the first operating laboratories in the Clinical Center. From there I joined the Cancer Chemotherapy National Service Center under Dr. Ken Endicott to develop the endocrine aspects of cancer chemotherapy. I spent two years with Dr. Endicott. The Endocrinology Study Section was interested in making steroids available for investigators who would apply for them for uses as markers in paper chromotography. Steroids were distributed by the U.S. Pharmacopea.

I became Executive Secretary to the Endocrinology Study Section in 1950. I give you this background because the distribution programs really started in the Endocrinology Study Section. During my tenure in cancer chemotherapy I had five or six contracts that I was to referree for making preparations of steroids for the program. With this experience I became familiar with the source for many steroids, most of which were not available commercially and got to be something of an authority on steroids and where they were from.

I carried that experience with me when I joined the Endocrinology Study Section; I acted as a clearing house for the scientific community and enlarged the hormone distribution program tremendously. SS: Was the Endocrinology Study Section the first one for which you served as Executive Secretary?

MG: Yes, I came in as the Executive Secretary. A few years before, the study section consisted of Endocrinology and Metabolism; then they separated the two. That is the basis for the hormone distribution program. I initiated a couple of meetings to form some sort of an organization to collect human pituitaries.

One of my first duties on the Study Section was meeting with Dr. Alfred Wilhelmi, who was former chairman of the Endocrinology Study Section. I talked to him and asked if there was anything I could get involved with, and he said, "I sure would like to get a hold of a few human pituitaries so that we can get growth hormone." I told him immediately, "Do you mind if I go see the people in He said, "Oh, no. Don't do that." He thought it would interfere industry?" with Morris Rabin's program up in Boston. Rabin was getting hormones from people, probably outside of the United States, and he would give them to one of the industrial people. Wilhelmi felt that if I contacted any of those people, it might interfere with that program. But I said, "Leave it to me." I knew all of these people because of my background in cancer chemotherapy, and when I called the people that were empowered to do something about it they were delighted to get that out of their hair, because it was a nuisance to them to have That's how the concept started. The only way to get a program of to do it. this nature was to call a meeting together with people who knew about it. There were several members of the Study Section who were interested, and they supplied me with other names. That's how I came to know everybody in endocrinology and the areas in which they worked. (It helps to know the people who know something!)

SS: That's a good point about networking: you met a group of people through your study section, and they in turn referred you to other people, so that gradually you became the expert about that profession and what was going on in that profession as a discipline.

2

Ð,

 $\bigcirc$ 

MG: Yes. That is the duty of an Executive Secretary. If they were serious about it and worked at it, that's what made them good executive secretaries. That is the kind of information required to select future study section members. During the early years of my tenure as Executive Secretary I operated the Hormone Distribution program, ran the clearing house for rare and hard to obtain steroids and ran the program for the collection and distribution of human pituitaries. These programs are currently operated under contracts at over \$100,000 per year.

SS: I'd like to get Mr. Gerring's early history also, and how he came. Then I want to talk about the critical role of the Executive Secretaries in learning about what was going on and inspiring new activities. Mr. Gerring, would you review some of your background?

IG: I graduated from Central High School in 1927 in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1927. From there, I attended the University of Connecticut and majored in bacteriology and chemistry, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1931. In 1933 I was admitted as a graduate student to the DeLamar Institute of Public Health, a division of Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, where I was awarded the Master of Science degree in Public Health. I was fortunate in being accepted there to a class limited to eight graduate students. It was there that I studied under highly competent teachers, but three in particular were outstanding pioneers in earlier days of the public health movement. One was Dr. Haven Emerson, a leader in public health administration; a second was Dr. Edwin Godfrey, an epidemiologist in the New York State Department of Health; and third, Professor Earl Phelps, a prominent sanitary engineer whose biochemical research led to modern concepts in development of standards for water pollution control and for potable water supplies. Incidentally, the Institute of Public Health was one of five universities offering degrees in public health in those years, whereas at present there are at least 25 offering such degrees.

SS: The rate at which public health consciousness has grown from less than thirty years ago is truly amazing.

IG: I was greatly impressed witht he need for the advancement of public health in the cities and states following my studies at Columbia. I therefore applied for and was accepted to a position as Chief of a section on environmental health in the large industrial city of Bridgeport, Connecticut. I stayed there for four years until 1939, learned a great deal about the political, economic and public relations aspects of operating a public health program. One of my proud accomplishments was to convince the city council to pass an ordinance (over the objection of several dairy farmers) to allow only pasteurized milk to be sold in Bridgeport. I also released to the local newspaper the details of a biostatistical study I made on infant mortality for that city, which was of special interest to the local health officer who operated a large baby health program for the entire community.

In 1939 I matriculated at the Horace Rockham School of graduate studies at the University of Michigan, where I furthered my studies in the biological sciences and public health. After two years of work there a professor urged me apply to the U.S. Public Health Service which was looking for people trained to in the public health field. I did so and was appointed Assistant Public Health Engineer after a six-week training program under the direction of two top level administrators, Dr. Mark Hollis, a sanitary engineer, and Dr. Roderick Heller, a medical doctor, both of whom played highly significant roles over the years during and after World War II in the development of strong sanitary engineering and medical programs for the benefit of entire country. I was assigned to the Washington, D.C. sanitary engineering field office for about six months to make surveys in several western cities to determine the needs for water supply expansion facilities necessitated by our entry into the war. Following this I was assigned to Malaria Control in War Areas headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. After some entomological training there, I was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Public Health Service and was sent to New Orleans for work in identifying those mosquitoes that could transmit malaria and yellow fever and to operate a program of spraying those waters around New Orleans where they were breeding.

SS: I am curious, why was New Orleans chosen?

3

)

3

Ð

IG: New Orleans was selected as a mosquito control area because it was an embarkation point for thousands of military personnel. A year later I received orders to proceed to Charleston, South Carolina to assist in an ongoing program there in typhus fever control, primarily for the protection of large numbers of military personnel stationed in the area. Incidentally, all of these programs also protected the civilian populations from these diseases. Within seven months I was assigned to health and sanitation activities in the territory of

3

Alaska. There I concentrated my efforts on the sanitation of food handling establishments in the cities of Anchorage, Fairbanks and Valdez, where thousands of soldiers were stationed in large areas from where they were permitted to enter the cities during their leave hours.

## SS: And what did some of you major responsibilities there include?

)

)

)

)

 $\bigcirc$ 

IG: In addition to routine inspections I organized programs where I lectured on sanitary practices to owners of and working personnel of food handling establishments. At the request of the medical officer in charge of Camp Richardson in Anchorage I taught army medical and engineering personnel the principles of restaurant sanitation and as a result the Army's medical office was instrumental in collaborating with me in placing several restaurants "off limits" to military personnel until they complied with sanitary standards. As an appreciation of my efforts I received a special commendation from the Alaska Anchorage Army Command.

When World War II ended I was requested by the Surgeon General in 1945 to return to Washington, D.C. where I was assigned to the War Assets Administration. That program was phased out a year later, but I was asked to continue as a commissioned officer in the Public Health Service on its nationwide food sanitation program. At that point I felt that I should enter other fields of public health besides sanitation. I resigned my commission and made known to the Public Health Service that I was looking for a position in an analytical or statistical program where I could use my biological education to a greater degree than I had been. Within six months I received notice from the personnel office to report to the National Institutes of Health for an interview for a biomedical research grants program that was in its early stages of development.

The Public Health Research Grants program at NIH began in 1946. After an interview with Dr. Cassius Van Slyke, Chief, and Ernest Allen, Assistant Chief of the Division of Research Grants, I was appointed an Executive Secretary in 1947 about nine months after the program started. There were only five study sections at that time and I had charge of two of them. One was the Public Health Research Study Section which involved research studies in public health education, medical care, epidemiology, public health nursing, and accident prevention. The other section was on Environmental Sciences, which included research in water pollution control, air pollution control, occupational health and industrial hygiene, food technology and waste disposal.

SS: May I ask both of you, particularly you, Mr. Gerring: when you got there, the study sections were set up, but did you ever hear anybody talk about what the inspiration of study sections was, or what was used as a model? Ernest Allen and others don't quite remember exactly whether they invented them, or whether it was an outgrowth of the war era.

IG: I don't know who first conceived of the idea of study sections as review groups. I do know, however, that the Army had a medical research program during the war for war-related diseases and injuries of military personnel and it is possible that the Army used peer review groups similar to study sections.

SS: Dr. Allen says it was already a tradition, whether formally or informally, to ask peers to review.

IG: This is entirely possible because the Milbank Fund is an example of a foundation that supported research projects through recommendations of peer review groups. It could be that the study section idea was developed there before the National Institutes of Health research grants program was started.

MG: There should be records of when each study section started. The minutes of the meetings of the study sections were preserved. That would give you the names and titles of the study sections.

SS: With Jerome Green's help I have just come across an article written by Dr. Van Slyke in 1947. He names all the existing study sections at that time and who was on them. One thing that is impressive about that, by the way, is that you were in very distinguished company as an Executive Secretary, weren't you?

IG: Yes, because of the high caliber of the scientists who were selected to be members of the study sections.

SS: Including you people who served as executive secretaries.

)

)

IG: I was interviewed for the position by Dr. Ernest Allen and Dr. Van Slyke. They were trying to find out, if I was worthy of taking the position, where would I fit in best? Well, I was so impressed when I came out of the School of Public Health at Columbia, and how bacteriology and chemistry, and how it fit into the environmental sciences, and with the professors there, that I decided to make that my life career. Allen and Van Slyke asked me questions about bacteriology and physiology, and even anatomy and the environmental sciences. I got a letter two weeks later saying that I had been chosen to be the Executive Secretary of the Environmental Study Section, and I wound up with eleven study sections that I had started. This was 1947 and I stayed until 1973.

SS: Just for the record, will you list your study sections?

From 1947 when I first came to the Division of Research Grants to 1973 when IG: I retired I was Executive Secretary at different intervals of the following study sections: Environmental Sciences and Engineering; Public Health Research; Parasitology and Tropical Medicine; Radiation; Population Research; Visual Sciences; Biostatistics and Biomathematics; Special Study Section, with reviewers who were selected on a meeting to meeting basis to make recommendations on large interdisciplinary projects that could not be adequately reviewed by any existing single study section; Water Pollution Control; Air Pollution Control; U.S.-Japan Cooperative Medical Research Program, established to do research pertaining to diseases in Southeast Asia. Of the six study sections established on this program, I was assigned as Executive Secretary to two, the Parasitology Study Section, and the Malnutrition Section. This made a total of thirteen sections. I was fortunate to serve as Executive Secretary to so many study sections because I was able to learn a great deal about biomedical research and to contribute to early activities and development. It was indeed a unique experience to have been associated with many of the finest scientists in this country. To my knowledge, no other executive secretary has ever served on nearly as many sections.

SS: When you were given your appointments as Executive Secretary to these sections, were your study sections already actually in place?

Yes. In my case this was so. But I felt that one was never an Executive MG: Secretary until all the people that you appointed replaced the predecessors. Then it became your study section and it was your responsibility to select and recommend individuals for study section membership. In order to do that, you had to know the areas in which applications were assigned to your study section forreview. It was up to the Executive Secretary to get reviewers who were experts in those particular areas. Endocrinology was rather unusual because it had four or five "islands" of interest such as thyroid, steroid hormones, reproduction, neuro-endocrine, etc. with specialists sitting next to each other, none of them knowing very much about the other fellow's expertise. It was up to an Executive Secretary to know where he needed people when vacancies existed, and the kind of person to put on the study section. I have been extremely fortunate, not because of my knowledge, but I made it a point to find out about people from all areas, covered the spectrum of my area -- endocrinology -- very well.

)

)

 $\supset$ 

)

)

SS: Did you have authority to invite people to become members of the study sections?

MG: No, we did not make the appointments. We recommended the people to the Division Chief, who would usually accept those recommended by the Exec. Sec. and the Chief would invite the individual to serve on the study section. The Division Chief was the one who asked the Director of NIH, who sent the letter of appointment.

IG: Another highly important responsibility of an Executive Secretary was to recommend to the Division Chief the replacements of members whose terms had expired. I found my members by reading scientific articles they publiched in journals, by attending national meetings and listening to presentations of their current research, and by consulting with current study section members as to the qualities of scientists I had in mind for nomination. When I made my final selections I would write a memorandum to the Division Chief to justify the need for a particular scientist. My goal was to secure the best possible scientists for the study sections because the research grants program relied heavily on their appraisals of these projects that were to be funded as the most promising research.

SS: Those are very important functions. Regarding the Division Chiefs, Ernest Allen was Chief from 1948. Who came after him?

IG: After Ernest Allen served as Chief for several years, there were four others I can recall who assumed that office until I retired in 1973. The one outstanding Chief in my opinion after Dr. Allen was a scientist by the name of Dale Lindsay, who is now at the University of California at the Davis Campus and I hope you will have the opportunity to interview him some day. The other Chiefs were Dr. Douglas, Dr. Comfrey and Dr. Hatchett.

SS: Allen was the one with the most continuity there, and according to you and others, he really was the one who built the grants program and study sections.

IG: I would say he was the main "cog in the wheel"; that he played the most important role in developing the policies and smooth operations of the Division of Research Grants. His willingness to take th time to listen to and exchange ideas with members of his staff gave him the opportunity to make the best decisions as the program expanded. SS: Under what specific authority was he able to create the study sections? Was it an informal practice? It's not in the legislation. Was it in the guidelines of the Public Health Service?

I don't think there was specific legislation to create study sections. When IG: I started in 1947 there were about five sections. As more and more applications came in, additional scientific disciplines had to be reviewed, so it became necessary to create more sections with expertise in those disciplines. They were created as the Division Chief saw the need for them after consultation with the Division's Project Assignment Officers and the particular Institute that would be involved. The creation of a new study section becomes important to the Executive Secretary assigned to that section because he is going to be responsible the selection of its members. Of the many sections I've had, I don't recall for any of my selections for membership being turned down, either as replacements on established sections, or in some instances on newly created sections. My experience has been that Executive Secretaries played a highly important role in the selection of the appropriate study section scientists. And those people who were selected were the ones who adjudicated not only the need for the research, but also which of the research proposals were the most promising to yield important findings. The excellence of the NIH research grants program is therefore primarily dependent on the high quality of its study sections members.

SS: Was that your experience as well, Mr. Graff?

O°.

 $\bigcirc$ 

MG: Yes. And very important also is that, along with these capable people looking at research grants and evaluating them, they were also charged to encourage research where they felt it was necessary for the future. In my study sections, they just kept growing. For a number of years my study section was the biggest in terms of the number of applications reviewed, and it kept growing and growing. At its highest, I believe there were about 168 applications for one round of a study section meeting, which was by far the record. I wrote all the pink sheets, which summarized what the study section thought of <u>each</u> application, and what the review body recommended.

SS: How would they then pick the Executive Secretaries for the new sections?

MG: An Executive Secretary never had to come in as an expert in the fields. You didn't have to be an endocrinologist, for example, to be and Executive Secretary — but you had to become familiar with the many areas involved.

SS: Ken Endicott said that, in fact, at one point, there was a sort of consensus that it might be a good idea if the study section secretaries weren't dealing with their own fields.

MG: That's a very important thing, because topics came up that were not in the secretary's field, and if he attempted to influence the review, the members of the study section would blow him away! They were the ones who were the experts. In my study section, the members knew I wouldn't offer my opinions on their area of expertise, and when it came to the administrative area, they didn't try to interfere. Dr. Endicott had this in mind, because the Executive Secretary was not a member of his study section; he was the administrator, and it was up to him to select proper people. They're the ones who had the experience to do the review of the applications.

IG: What Dr. Endicott said was actually put into practice. Executive Secre-

taries served primarily in an administrative capacity and did not make recommentdations nor participate in the scientific review during the meetings. In many cases however, Executive Secretaries were assigned to sections pertinent to their scientific education and training. In my case, for example, I was assigned to the Environmental Sciences and Public Health Research Study Sections in which I had a good background in education, training and experience. This made it much easier for me to initiate program planning activities for these study sections beyond the review of applications.

 $\mathcal{D}$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

)

)

SS: I see. So, although field expertise was not a prerequisite, it was actually very useful to the executive secretaries in their administrative functions?

And on other study sections wo which I was assigned, I had little IG: Yes. scientific knowlege but with a biological and chemical public health education background, I at least had a deep insight and appreciation of any biological scientific discipline. I can illustrate two examples in my case as to how Executive Secretaries could serve NIH in various programs, if needed. In the late 1950s, there was a very large fish kill in Lake Michigan due to pesticides seepage from surrounding agricultural land sprays. As a result, Secretary Finch of HEW established a commission of nationally outstanding scientists to make a complete study of the types of pesticides used in the nation, the problems caused by their use, and how necessary they were for adequate food production. This study was to result in recommendations for saft usage of the different pesticides. I was requested by Dr. Emil Mrak, Chairman of the Commission, to serve as a staff member of NIH. My job was to collect as much of the more recent scientific literature, already published and any research in progress that might be worthwhile submitting to the commission members. Through the help of the National Library of Medicine, the Agricultural Research Service and the National Institute of Environmental Sciences I found and reviewed about 65 scientific articles, 45 of which I submitted to the commission as worthwhile and which they found most helpful in their mission. I was also invited to attend all subcommittee meetings of this commission so that I could be in a better position to serve their needs. The Director of NIH, Dr. Shannon, relieved me of all my duties to the study sections so that I could be full time with this commission.

When the Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases decided to establish a special Committee on Biological Warfare, I was assigned as Executive Secretary because of my bacteriological and environmental sciences background. The major purpose of this group was to cooperate with the State Health Department Laboratories in finding methods and establishing standards for counteracting bacterial contamination of large drinking water supplies.

MG: Regarding what Dr. Endicott said about not appointing anyone who was professional in the particular field of the study section: The way we got around our lack of knowledge in many of the particular fields that we dealt with was through the appointment of committees. I had nine committees at one time that I could depend on. I always said that if you were a good Exec. Sec., you could be effective in any one of the study sections. But you had to get in and learn as you went along. It didn't matter whether or not I knew all about the fields; I knew people who did know it.

SS: I am sure knowing such professionals helped immensely and put you in better positions to plan and determine the needs for the study sections.

IG: When I first came to Visual Sciences study section, there weren't any conferences or planning — they just reviewed applications. I had a new section formed in basic research. I listened and studied the eye, and learned all about the anatomy of the eye before I ever started so I would have some feeling for what was going on. On that section, there were certain questions that arose, and I noticed this. I never said, "Hey, we ought to do this or that." But I would say, "There are a lot of questions coming up that I'd like to know. I'm the new Exec. Sec., will somebody please answer them?" In this way I raised the questions, which finally led me to say, for instance, "Why don't we run an epidemiological program on this particular phase of the visual sciences." Somebody would say, "Hey, good idea. Can we get money for it?" You bet we could get money for it. We just had to get a committee to develop that aspect, then run a big national conference on that particular aspect of eye disease. I never said, "Do this." I brought it up as a question I raised.

SS: You yourselves, as Executive Secretaries, saw needs and raised questions and sometimes directly or indirectly proposed new areas of attention. But did you also get ideas from others? Did the Institute directors or others call you up and say, "We have a sense that this or that is needed, would you look into it?"

IG: No, I don't ever recall an Institute Director or any of their personnel calling to suggest programs for research needs that study sections might promote. A few of the Executive Secretaries, however, did make suggestions to study sections to promote activities that would be helpful to the scientific community, although they were not required to do so. For example, in my case, I wrote articles in several national scientific journals describing the research grants program in relation to the specific scientific disciplines of the study sections I had.

SS: I see.

)

 $\bigcirc$ 

Э

MG: I too think it went the other way around.

I initiated program planning committees in several of my study sections for IG: the purpose of analyzing the types of applications being reviewed and to determine whether some areas of research needed emphasis. Study section members were always enthused to act on these committees and to voluntarily give extra time and effort beyond their review of applications, which was really their only responsibility to the NIH. As a result, over the years the Environmental Sciences section organized about 25 national conferences and small workshops in the fields of air and water pollution, food technology, agricultural chemical hazards, and occupational health. Most of the proceedings of these were published and widely distributed to universities and colleges and governmental I was personally was invited and gave talks on all of these subjects agencies. at meetings of national professional associations. The main purpose of the study section-sponsored conferences was to disseminate information in their particular areas and to encourage and stimulate research.

When I was first assigned to the Radiation Study Section I noted dureing the review of applications that there was a great deal of controversy and lack of knowledge regarding the radiation dosage that could be administered without causing injury or sickness. In recognizing the great importance of this matter I asked for a committee of section members to be appointed by the section chairman to study the possibility of sponsoring a national conference that would result in a publication on all aspects of this problem in the hope that students and university researchers would be stimulated to submit worthwhile projects. The committee recommended a conference to be held and this resulted in the publication of a book on the subject.

SS: I am sure that was helpful to scientists involved in radiation research.

IG: Oh yes. I also initiated the establishment of program planning committees on the Parasitology and Visual Sciences study sections. They too sponsored conferences to point out the research needs in their respective areas and to exchange information on current research.

You know, when you get the picture from the Institute levels you may think MG: they had more to do with what was funded than the study sections did. But it was only very rarely that an idea came from the Institutes themselves. The ideas always came from the study sections. The members would bring things up and ask the Exec. Secs. to see what could be done. As an example, there would be conferences in areas where they would want to educate the members of the review group in what was going on in research in a new area. Through workshop meetings, research was encouraged in specific areas. We used to have a free hand in that, until money got tight and the Institutes began to take over. They had the money to do it, so they made the conferences into very large conferences. That happened at the Cancer Institute. They would hold tremendous conferences with several thousands of participants rather than a meeting of thirty to fifty people. So, the business of inviting people for workshops or study groups really originated in the study sections, but it was subsequently removed from their control and now it's very rare that they're allowed to have conferences because they have no money in the Division of Research Grants for that. The Institutes wanted to pay all grants and have all grants reviewed for own their Institute. The Cancer Institute was one of the first. They even opened up their own review group because they wanted to have more applications approved.

SS: The Cancer Institute actually had its own grants program. They gave a few grants before the NIH had the extramural grants program.

When there were pressures for the NIH to do more in a particular field or some very specific thing, like with retrolental fibroplasia, and somebody would testify on it before a Congressional committee, and Mr. Fogarty would say, "We ought to do something about that", then how would that be reflected in the grants program?

MG: They would invite applications on research in that area, through journals or announcements. The Institute with the particular area would be deluged with applications.

SS: How did you handle that?

MG: The best we could!

)

).

)

)

 $\bigcirc$ 

)

SS: Ernest Allen told me about the first year that he and Dave Price went out and talked about sanitation and hygiene and malaria, and other things NIH would be making grants on, so there's an old tradition of that.

IG: One of the first three or four sections was in environmental sciences or sanitation. I went out with a Council member. He actually asked me to go with

him, saying, "I don't know what to tell the universities." Executive Secretaries had the freedom to publish anything as long as it was within the program. Usually a chairman of the study section or another section member were presidents of the national organizations. If the section was on food technology, we had a member who was president of the Food Technology Association.

When we were afraid of poisons in all the waters, we also developed a program on biological warfare. NIH called on me to become Exec. Sec. of that study section in addition to my other duties because I was a professional bacteriologist. I worked with Dr. Gale Dack, who was chairman of the Department of Bacteriology at the University of Chicago, and with the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Davis, and we went out on field trips. We would talk to the laboratory directors across the country. We talked about biological warfare and how we wanted the program was going to develop and what we expected that they might do to help the national program. These are the kinds of things, these special programs that developed, that the exec secs could participate in. Dr. Jonas Salk was a member of this program on biological warfare, and Dr. Al Sabin was on it, doing his work on polio, which shows you the caliber of the members.

)

)

 $\bigcirc$ 

)

)

MG: In my tenure with Endocrinolgy, I had two or three people who were Nobel Prize winners: Roger Guillemin and Rosalyn Yalow were two. All the other agencies in the government were invited, if they wished to have observers, to come to study section meetings in their areas of interest. Any number of them would get people from the Veterans Administration and other agencies of the government, and these people would come and just sit there contributing nothing. But in Endocrinology, I loved to have these people come, because they served as back-ups. I made them work; so they didn't just sit and listen and fall asleep. That's a very important example of what the right kind of Executive Secretary could do, instead of having a bunch of silent observers. And it helped particularly since we had so many applications.

IG: I wanted to mention a couple of other important people. There's one person who probably knows as much about the Division and the operations of the Institutes as well as anybody, and that is Dale Lindsey. He is at the University of California. He was the chief of the Division at one time, and was an assistant chief with Ernest Allen. He was a commissioned officer with the Public Health Service for many years and he is dedicated to this day. He's never retired. Emo Morack was a very enthusiastic study section member who was Chancellor of the University of California at Davis. He is one of the outstanding food technologists in the country today. He was on two study sections. There was also Jack McKee, who was at Cal. Tech. These were some outstanding study section members. They were also put on councils because of their dedications and ability to have input into all NIH programs.

MG: The Institutes appreciated the role and ability of the study sections. I was called a number of times by the different Institutes to tell what I thought about certain people and who I would like to see on their councils. I gave them names then, but I doubt if they allow it now. One of the best people I recommended was Dorothy Kreeger, who was on the Aging Council. Executive Secretaries were not "supposed" to tell the councils what to do, but at rare times we were asked to advise them.

SS: What is the connection between the councils and the study sections. Each Institute had its own council, and the council is the official body that finally

#### approves the grants?

IG: The Surgeon General has the final authority on the approval of grants. The councils were composed of scientists and of lay people who were well known for their leadership in the health field.

SS: I take it that the council is also supposed to have a role in broad policy and general directions.

IG: Councils are basically policy-making bodies so that the lay people were able to have important input with the scientists on matters related to the policies related to the development of research needs and to the policies related to the overall operation of the research grants program. However, the scientists on the councils quite frequently raised questions on the scientific aspects of an application in relation to recommendations made by the study sections.

In most instances, Executive Secretaries who were present at council meetings could satisfactorialy answer the concern of a council member based on the discussions that took place at his section's meetings. If not, then the applications were usually deferred and sent back to the study section to secure the necessary information.

SS: Did this occur often?

)

)

Э

)

IG: Occasionally, but not often. If a study section brought up a policy matter in considering an application, that matter would be set aside as a separate item on the summary sheet for the council's consideration. (Study sections are instructed to make their recommendations for approval or disapproval of an application only on the basis of scientific merit and never on points of policy.) This was a good practice since the study sections in this way were helpful to council members in consideration of their policy-making decisions. Councils had the authority to make final recommendations for approval or disapproval of an application, but rarely dealt with appraisals on the scientific merit of a proposal. As I mentioned, it is actually the Surgeon General who has the final authority to make the grants, but I don't ever recall the scientific merit values determined by the study sections to be rejected.

MG: The study sections were never formally allowed to make policy. Questions of policy were always referred to the councils.

IG: This was good, because the study sections were composed of powerful scientists It was a two-way communication. They helped each other.

Applications would occasionally come to study sections involving research in a foreign country which raised policy concerns. As an example, I recall one that was assigned to one of my study sections for birth control research in India. At the time the proposal was submitted, the study section learned from the Agency for International Development that the Indian government had just established a new Ministry of Health, and the new Minister strenuously opposed foreign scientists conducting research on birth control in his country. Although the study section recommended the application for approval on scientific merit, the council disapproved it because of the policy considerations that were called to its attention on the summary statement.

MG: Once in awhile an application would come from Italy or Germany or France,

and as far as the science was concerned, the scientists would evaluate it. They didn't care about the race or nationality or even age of the one who made the application; but they wanted to know what was the policy of the United States in giving money to other countries. Each Institute would do their own evaluations, where they would judge only on scientific merit.

Э

)

 $\supset$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

C

O

 $\bigcirc$ 

ં

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

SS: So, although the role of Executive Secretary of study sections has changed over the years, the job you men had was multi-faceted. You have clarified for me the differences in function and jurisdiction of the study sections and councils, each being an essential, integral part of the grant-making process. This is fine information gentlemen. Thank you.

#### CURRICULUM VITAE

Mr. Irving Gerring 7 Pinecrest Court Greenbelt, MD 20770

# Education:

Ó

 $\bigcirc$ 

Ì

0

9

 $\bigcirc$ 

Graduated Central High School, Bridgeport, CT, 1927

B.S. degree in Bacteriology and Chemistry, 1931, University of Connecticut

M.S. degree in Public Health, 1935, Columbia University

Graduate work in Biology and Public Health, Horace Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan, 1939-41

#### Professional Experience:

1935 - 1939:	Chief of Environmental	Health Section,	City of	Bridgeport
	Connecticut Health Dep	partment		

- 1942 1943 Associate Public Health Engineer, Division of Sanitary Engineering, U.S. Public Health Service
- 1943 1944 Commissioned Corps, U.S. PHS, Malaria and Typhus Fever Control
- 1944 1945 Territory of Alaska Health and Sanitation Programs
- 1946 1947 War Assets Administration
- 1947 1973 Health Science Administrator and Executive Secretary, National Institutes of Health, to the following study sections: Air Pollution, Water Pollution, Occupational Health, Public Health Research, Radiation, Parasitology and Tropical Medicine, Population Research, Visual Sciences, Biomathematics and Biostatistics, Special Study Section, and U.S.-Japan Cooperative Medical Research Program. Retired 1973.