# THE 1980S: FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE (1981–1990)

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During the early 1980s, NABT had significant challenges as an organization. Fortunately, the strength of its members allowed NABT to become a well-recognized powerhouse of science teaching during the 1990s. In the 1980s, NABT met the challenges of declining funds and a declining membership. With staunch member support, a change in staff leadership led to financial soundness while addressing the varying needs of the membership to teach biology effectively. Special-interest sections were formed within the organization, and content-rich monographs were published to support the growing needs of biology educators.

## ○ NABT Becomes the Defender of Scientific Thinking

*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was issued in 1983. This document described "the rising tide of mediocrity" within the educational system of the United States, especially in science. The major national issue was the upgrading of student competency in the sciences. Edward J. Kormondy (1981 NABT President) stated that "if teachers of science, math, and technology, as well as all other subjects, do not regard themselves as professionals imbued with knowledge, experiences and skill, the enterprise will crumble" (Kormondy, 1985).

In response to this need, NABT began to develop special publications such as *New Directions in Biology Teaching*. A series of monographs was planned to provide teachers with useful classroom exercises and laboratories as supplements to their existing curricula (see Table 1). NABT partnered with the American Society of Zoologists to distribute their book series, *Science as a Way of Knowing* (Mayer, 1989b). The updating of biology content was the key to supporting NABT's membership and to attracting and increasing new membership.

Other examples of NABT's growth as a frontrunner in life science education occurred during the 1984 Conference. Computers' introduction into the classroom was just beginning. At this conference, Purdue University sponsored several sessions on the use of technology in classrooms – a first for NABT (J. B. Kahle, pers. comm.).

In its continued leadership, NABT stood firmly on the side of science as the creationism issue was being extensively promoted by anti-evolutionists:

> NABT was thoroughly embroiled in the battle to prove that creationism is not a science. Fortunately for life science educators, Judge William R. Overton, United States District Judge in Arkansas (McLean v. Arkansas in 1982) delivered a thoughtful and comprehensive decision that overturned a state law that required teaching the creationist as well as the biological explanation of evolution. His ruling was reprinted in the *ABT* in March 1982. (J. B. Kahle, pers. comm.)

**Table 1. NABT Monographs Published during the 1980s.**

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| ***New Directions in Biology Teaching: Perspectives for the 1980s***<br>Edited by Faith M. Hickman and Jane Butler Kahle, 1982<br>ISBN 0941212017 |
| ***Human Ecology: A Perspective for Biology Education***<br>Rodger W. Bybee, 1984<br>ISBN 0941212041 |
| ***Biotechnology, Genetic Engineering, and Society***<br>George H. Kieffer, 1987<br>ISBN 094121205X |

In response to the creationism issue, NABT initiated a bimonthly newsletter, *Scientific Integrity*, that dealt not only with the anti-evolutionists, but also with other attacks on science and the growing public interest in pseudoscience.

In addition to the use of computers in the classroom and creationism, other issues facing biology educators in the 1980s were the use of animals in scientific endeavors and genetic engineering. Animal rights groups had a presence at the National Conferences and confronted our members on the use of animals in their classrooms. NABT responded by providing a policy statement on "Use of Animals in the Classroom" in support of life educators nationwide (N. Ridenour, pers. comm.).

As the 1980s passed, NABT supported its teachers not only through monographs, partnerships, and policy statements, but also with its increasingly powerful and recognized journal. *ABT* devoted two special issues to computer use: the "All Computer Issue" (March 1984) and "Software Development in Biology Education" (January 1985). Developments in molecular biology, specifically recombinant DNA and immunology, required space in the biological curriculum and were reflected in two *ABT* issues devoted to Genetic Engineering (see Table 2).

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**Table 2. Special Topic Issues of *ABT* Published during the 1980s.**

| TOPICS |
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| Acid Rain (April–May 1983, vol. 45, no. 4) |
| Ecology and Evolution of Animal Behavior (October 1983, vol. 45, no. 6) |
| All Computer Issue (March 1984, vol. 46, no. 3) |
| Human Ecology (September 1984, vol. 46, no. 6) |
| Genetic Engineering Part 1 (October 1984, vol. 46, no. 7) |
| Genetic Engineering Part 2 (November–December 1984, vol. 46, no. 8) |
| Software Development in Biology Education (January 1985, vol. 47, no. 1) |
| Health Education (March 1985, vol. 47, no. 3) |
| The History, Philosophy and Sociology of Biology (April 1985, vol. 47, no. 4) |
| Neurobiology and Behavior (May 1985, vol. 47, no. 5) |
| 50th Anniversary Issue (September 1988, vol. 50, no. 6) |

## ○ Growth of NABT as an Organization

As NABT grew as an organization, committees and special-interest sections were created. The first of these was the Two-Year College Section, formed during the 1980 National Conference and formally established during the 1984 NABT Conference held at Purdue University (D. Emmeluth, pers. comm.). In 1981, President Ed Kormondy established the Role and Status of Women in Biology Education Committee, chaired by Jane Butler Kahle (Mayer, 1989b). The Four-Year College Section was formed in 1985, followed by the International Section in 1989 (L. Blessing, pers. comm.). Currently, NABT has 5 sections and 14 committees.

## ○ "A Turbulent Time for NABT & Biology Teachers Worldwide"

The early 1980s were a time of significant change for NABT. Jane Butler Kahle, 1983 NABT President, describes this as a

> "turbulent period for biology teaching and for NABT. For biology teachers nationwide, the creationist controversy was in full swing, NABT had attempted a different type of convention and the organization's finances were in the red…. NABT's membership dropped 15 percent between 1983 and 1984…. The Board of Directors learned at its Spring Board Meeting that NABT's expenditures were greater than its income and that the endowment fund was being used to cover staff salaries. (J. B. Kahle, pers. comm.)

To cut costs, the 1984 National Conference was held at Purdue University. In addition, the Outstanding Biology Teacher Award (OBTA) was suspended for a year because American Optical stopped providing their microscopes as gifts. Cost-saving measures were to incorporate *News & Views* into *ABT* and to reduce *ABT* to eight issues a year, with a combined April–May issue in 1982–1983. While NABT was tightening its belt, signs of growth included a new column in *ABT*, "Biology Today" by Maura Flannery, in 1982. This well-respected and often quoted column continued until 2012. Special-topic issues continued to be published (see Table 2).

In 1983, Wayne Moyer stepped down as executive director, and LeRoy Lee became the interim director. In 1984, Pat McWethy became the third executive director of NABT and the editorship of *ABT* changed. Joan Creager, who had been the *ABT* editor since 1974, left her post in 1981 and was followed by Alan McCormack, who stayed on as editor until 1984. He was followed by John Jungck as interim editor until Randy Moore became editor in 1985. Randy remained the *ABT* editor until 2004.

During this time of change, the staff of three pulled together with Pat McWethy at the helm, Lu Bukovskey as director of finance, and Louise Pittack as secretary. The organization moved forward to become substantially sound, and membership increased significantly. In the words of George Zahrobsky (1986 NABT President), the staff "did a super job in getting the organization back on track." He attributes his success as president to Louise Pittack during his presidency (G. Zahrobsky, pers. comm.).

With new leadership, there was a reversal in the six-year membership decline, and the roster once again began to grow. The finances were positive. In 1987, the first education director, Rosalina Hairston, was hired. Her work involved "grant development and procurement and bringing an increased awareness of educational process and materials to the membership" (D. Emmeluth, pers. comm.). By 1989, President John Penick found NABT with a growing membership, a surplus in the bank, no major expenses, and a conference in San Diego entitled "Biology Education: Moving Toward the 21st Century" (J. Penick, pers. comm.) – a true testament to the leadership and membership of NABT as it became the leader in life science education in the next decade.

## ○ A Celebration of 50 Years of Service

The 1988 National Conference was held in Chicago to celebrate NABT's 50th year. Chicago was a fitting site for this celebration, given that NABT was incorporated in Illinois. The 1989 September and October issues of *ABT* contained the history of NABT, written by the 1967 NABT President William V. Mayer (1989a, b). A 50th Anniversary Club was initiated for those contributing $50 or more that included many past and future NABT presidents. *News & Views* listed those members since 1963 as 25-year members. Many of those members are familiar names in biology education: Paul F. Brandwein, Jack L. Carter, Paul J. Hummer, Paul DeHart Hurd, Manert H. Kennedy, Jerry Lightner, Ivo E. Lindauer, L. S. McLClung, Joseph D. Novak, Stanley D. Roth, Burton V. Ross, Albert Towle, and Robert E. Yager (*News & Views*, November 1988).

Jane Abbott, 1988 NABT president, reflected on the first 50 years of NABT:

> We are cognizant that the real strength of NABT is invested in its membership. All of you have contributed as authors, reviewers,

> committee members, convention participants, and leaders. The *sine qua non* of a strong organization is the involvement of the membership, and I'm looking forward to seeing what the next 50 years will bring. (Abbott, 1988)

In his final article on the history of NABT, William Mayer concludes that

> NABT has experienced crises and weathered them. Its existence is not only appreciated but supported. What the future brings no one knows for sure, but for NABT the next 50 years will most certainly include a continued stand for the integrity of science, for the betterment of the lot of biology teachers, for a public familiar with the contributions and limitations of science, and for students who will ultimately react intelligently to problems of the day and who will be biologists of the future. (Mayer, 1989b)

The same can be said now as NABT celebrates its 75th year and prepares to reach its 100th Anniversary as an organization focused on biology educators.

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