

PRESIDENT OF THE TENNESSEE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE FOR 2007

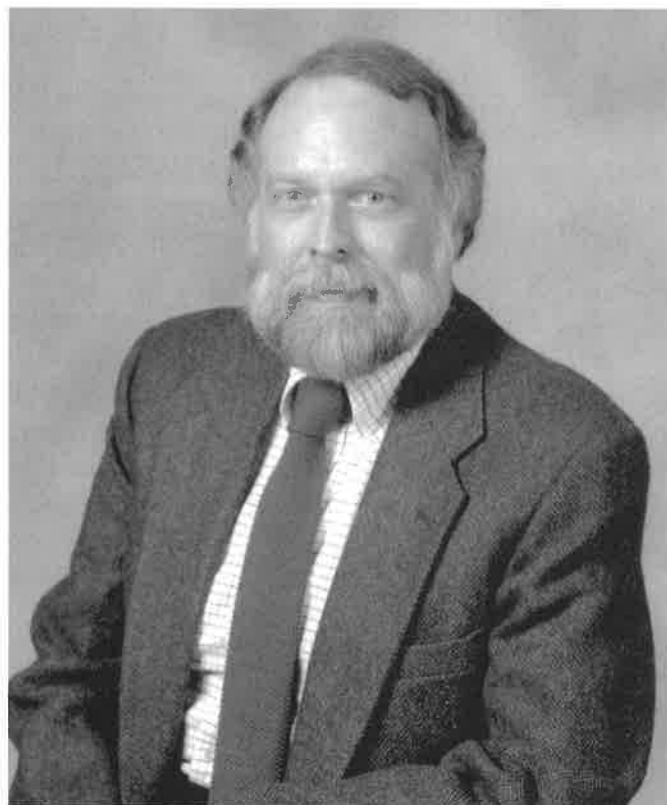
Many years ago, a friend expressed significant confusion concerning my professional status. Was I, she wondered, an historian masquerading as a scientist or a scientist masquerading as an historian? As the years have passed, this academic ambiguity has not lessened.

As incoming president of the Tennessee Academy of Science, tradition directs that I submit a few autobiographical comments to the membership. My involvement with science has been as much a matter of timing as of longstanding interest. A product of the post-Sputnik reform of science education, I was early exposed to scientific concepts in the public schools of Arizona. As was the case with many of us educated during the late 1950s and 1960s, the assumption that promising students would ultimately enter a scientific discipline went largely unquestioned. After a year as a chemistry major at New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, however, this assumption came under challenge. Although my academic performance was adequate, I realized that I did not possess the ability to pursue science professionally. Having faced a similar decision a few years earlier when considering a career in classical music, it seemed to me that I was running out of options. Fortunately, the humanities faculty at New Mexico Tech directed me toward the field of history and encouraged me to transfer to the University of Arizona.

My undergraduate career at Arizona followed a largely traditional history curriculum (BA, 1973), although history of science courses and considerably more science and math courses than were required set me somewhat apart. I remained in Tucson for graduate study (MA, 1974; PhD, 1978), largely to pursue a dissertation that was ideally suited to my interest and preparation. Andrew Ellicott Douglass, best known as the founder of dendrochronology but also an important figure in the development of astronomy in the United States, was a member of the university faculty from 1906 until his death in 1962. He left his papers to the University of Arizona library, where they were preserved and catalogued. The splendid organization of these documents made the task of sifting through more than 180 boxes of material much less daunting. Following completion of the dissertation, I joined the history faculty at Tennessee Technological University in 1978 and have taught at least two history of science courses each year since.

My association with the Tennessee Academy of Science began in 1983, when I presented the first of nearly twenty papers. Five years later, working with well-known Academy historian James X. Corgan, I played a role in organizing the new History of Science section. These and similar activities led to my election as a Fellow in 1989, service as section chair on several occasions, and selection as the plenary speaker for the 1996 meeting. This address was published in the *Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science* (1997), as was an historical account of the 1967 repeal of the Butler Act (1984).

My scholarly activity has followed diverse paths. In addition to more than 100 publications in professional journals and reference works, my research has resulted in three books, all of which have been reasonably well received. A significantly



Dr. George E. Webb

revised version of my dissertation appeared in 1983 as *Tree Rings and Telescopes: The Scientific Career of A. E. Douglass* (University of Arizona Press), followed in 1994 by *The Evolution Controversy in America* (University Press of Kentucky). My most recent book, *Science in the American Southwest: A Topical History* (University of Arizona Press, 2002), is obviously a return to my Southwestern roots, but also is noteworthy because it reveals the importance of science to the development of the region. This volume received the 2003 Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà Award of the Historical Society of New Mexico. My current primary research project is a detailed historical study of the 1877 American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Nashville.

If there is a theme in my research and teaching activity, it is an emphasis on science as an important component of human history. Not only does such a perspective provide a crucial addition to historical knowledge, but also allows the science historian to provide his audience with scientific awareness that is often missing in the humanities and social sciences. Similarly, science organizations such as the Tennessee Academy of Science have an important role to play in broadening the public's scientific perspective and knowledge. We have, perhaps, been so concerned with the preparation of future scientists that we have neglected the preparation of

future well-informed citizens. Although few would challenge the necessity of adding to our supply of able and well-educated scientists, it is also essential that the broader public possesses sufficient understanding of science to make informed decisions

concerning scientific or technological issues. It is my sincere hope that during the next year, the Tennessee Academy of Science will continue to address issues relating to the public understanding of science in the twenty-first century.

TENNESSEE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

REQUEST FOR NOMINATION OF FELLOWS

The TAS Fellows Committee invites members of the Academy to nominate worthy individuals for recognition as "Fellows of the Tennessee Academy of Science". Nominations must be submitted by September 30 to be considered for election at the fall annual meeting. Nominees should:

1. Be active members of the Tennessee Academy of Science
2. Have participated enthusiastically in the activities of the Academy in more than one of the following ways:
 - a. Section Chairperson
 - b. Editor
 - c. Field Trip Leader
 - d. Committee Service
 - e. Publication in the *Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science*
 - f. Paper presentations at Academy meetings
3. Be a researcher, educator, administrator, or a professional involved in science endeavors in Tennessee.

Please submit nominations with a brief resume to: Teresa Fulcher, TAS Secretary, Department of Natural and Behavioral Sciences, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, 10915 Hardin Valley Road, Knoxville, TN 37933. E-mail: tfulcher@pstcc.edu. Nominations will be forwarded to the TAS Fellows Committee for consideration.