



Giulio Fezzardini

# Aocs 1909 – 2009

## 100 years of history to pave the way for a new future

GIULIO FEZZARDINI  
HPC Today  
giulio@teknoscienze.com

The history of the American Oil Chemists Society begins in 1909, when during the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Interstate Cottonseed Crusher's Association Meeting a group of nine people decides to set up an organization aiming at fostering the exchange of ideas, contributions, scientific experience in the fats, oils, surfactants, detergents and related materials fields. Having over 4000 members worldwide, AOCS stands today, a century since its foundation, as an international society with influence throughout the world.



14<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Hot Springs National Park, May 1, 1923

AOCS mission is: "To be a global forum to promote the exchange of ideas, information, and experience, to enhance personal excellence, and to provide high standards of quality among those with a professional interest in the science and technology of fats, oils, surfactants, and related materials [...] The mission of AOCS is to provide high standards of quality among those with a professional interest in the science and technology of fats, oils, surfactants, and related materials and is continually fulfilled by AOCS Technical Services. Its esteemed products and services help professionals maintain excellence in their industry" (1).

AOCS activities range from an intense meeting organization activity, with international congresses, conferences and workshops, to a strong editorial activity, with the publication of books, manuals and highly scientific journals, such as JAOCS – JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN OIL CHEMIST'S SOCIETY, the JOURNAL OF SURFACTANTS AND DETERGENTS, and LIPIDS. AOCS also strongly supports research through awards granted to research work that stands out for the contribution provided to oleochemistry, while special attention is reserved to education of young researchers and students. Moreover, AOCS provides a broad range of technical services to the

sector industry.

AOCS contribution to oleochemistry is particularly important today if we think to the ongoing discussion on delicate issues like biofuels and the implications for a sustainable development in the search for new resources and the exploitation of existing ones.

100 years of history are quite an achievement in terms of time, and have a highly symbolic significance. AOCS 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary comes at a crucial time in the history of

the contemporary world. 100 years marked by two terrible world wars – all wars are terrible of course, yet the range of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars make them, sadly, epochal milestones. In this period, we've experienced unprecedented international crises at all levels, yet it has also been 100 years of discoveries, inventions that have dramatically changed the world, speeding up the pace of the planet to incredible velocities. A pace that has created opportunities, yet also new issues to deal with. This is why the work of AOCS scientists, prophetically foreseen, dreamt about and then in the end carried out, has provided irrenouncable support to finding solutions for the ever more concerning issues of today.

Would that small 9-member group in 1909 have ever imagined what goals AOCS was bound to achieve? I think not. The beauty and greatness of large projects always have the taste of a dream. Tiny seeds are sown to become great trees, without those that had first ploughed the soil ever having the chance to realize what they had set to happen. AOCS history is, allow me to use the expression, an "American" story, in the most beautiful and positive sense this expression implies. We have all the elements to state that: the pioneering aspect, the feature of an association of people bound together by common interests, who are capable of broadening their views beyond particular scope-limited issues to meet globally shared needs, the strong identity, which is

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both local and national. Sticking to the subject, it's all about the right, typically American, chemistry fostering relations and ties among people. You need just to attend an AOCS meeting to feel this kind of positive atmosphere among attendees, and experience the spirit that drives AOCS to succeed.

AOCS 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary comes in a very particular time, a time of serious economic recession like we have never seen before, which by the way began in the very same US, and at the same time it is celebrated in a year that sees the historical election of Mr. Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. In mentioning the many events and moments these 100 years of AOCS have experienced and dealt with, I have deliberately not mentioned the 1929 Big Crash, whose devastating effects have often been recalled recently. I believe that in such difficult times as those we are experiencing today, it might help to take a look at the day-by-day history of AOCS early years, with the support of the precious information on those times made available by AOCS on their website (2), where you can run through the history of the Association by reading a collection of newspaper articles of the time. *The roaring '20s are ending as the Great depression is arriving* is the title of the article on that time. The two AOCS Presidents of that time, W.R. Stryker in 1929 and W.H. Irvin in 1930, find themselves guiding the Association in a dramatic moment of US history. Nonetheless, the article's main facts box summarizing those years tells about an intense association activity, dense with meetings and events. You can perceive the ongoing buzz of those years, which had never stopped, and in the middle of all this shines the light of the Nobel Prize in chemistry awarded in 1932 to Irving Langmuir for his work in surface chemistry. Sometimes looking over our shoulders at our past is a good thing to do, especially when living troubled times, to try to find the resources to face today's challenges. Indeed, we are living an epochal moment in history, and once again the US are in the front line. Today, all the world is looking to the election of Mr. Obama with hope for true change. Will he succeed in meeting expectations, hope and dreams? Personally speaking, I am convinced he will. Because the President of the United States isn't just a man of undoubtedly high professional and personal qualities, but actually he is well aware that, along with the help of a dedicated staff of experts, he has the support of an entire nation, a Country that in the dramatic times of its history has always been able to find the strength and ability to stand up again. The "Yes, we can" slogan, perhaps thoroughly used and abused, reveals however a deeply rooted truth. Every single American knows how to be a nation and work with a spirit that goes beyond his personal scope. "Yes, we can" was what those forward-looking nine people were stating in 1909 at the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Interstate Cottonseed Crusher's Association Meeting, when they decided to make a dream come true: organize and develop their work to foster the common good. AOCS 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary is the best evidence showing that the dream has indeed come true, by working together. The Association, influential all over the world today, is there to tell us, yet again, that "Yes, we can", we can make it through again. This is HPC Today and Teknoscienze's wish to our AOCS friends and colleagues, with the certainty that the next anniversary will be celebrated with an article describing 2009 as the start of a new venture, of a dream come true, of a challenge won.

### REFERENCES

1. [www.aocs.org](http://www.aocs.org)
2. [www.aocs.org/100/index.cfm?page=informa](http://www.aocs.org/100/index.cfm?page=informa)