

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
CONFERENCE
OF CHIEFS OF
CUSTOMS LABORATORIES**

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Proceedings of the Conference of Chiefs of Customs Laboratories by Various

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VARIOUS

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Proceedings of The Conference of Chiefs of Customs Laboratories

held at

The Port of New York, March 6-9, 1916

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE OF CHIEFS OF CUSTOMS LABORATORIES.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, *March 6, 1916.*

The following members attended the conference: F. J. Bates, Washington, D. C.; E. R. Pickrell, New York, N. Y.; J. A. Hynes, Chicago, Ill.; C. S. Curtis, Kansas City, Mo.; L. B. McSorley, Philadelphia, Pa.; W. L. Howell, New Orleans, La.; F. D. Simons, Baltimore, Md.; D. L. Coburn, Boston, Mass.; and Fred West, San Francisco, Cal.

The conference convened at 10.30 a. m. and was called to order by Mr. Bates.

Mr. BATES. Gentlemen, it gives me more pleasure than I can express to call the first, and let us hope the annual, conference of the chiefs of our customs laboratories to order. Unfortunately neither Assistant Secretary Peters nor the Chief of the Customs Division, Mr. Halstead, is able to be with us. I was only apprised of this fact on Saturday by receiving letters from each, which I am sure will be of interest to the members of the conference. These letters are as follows. The first is from Mr. Peters:

MARCH 3, 1916.

MY DEAR MR. BATES: It is with genuine regret that I find myself unable to attend the session of the Conference of Customs Chemists to be held in New York next week. Were it not for the fact that I sail for South America on the 7th I would most certainly have arranged to be present at the opening session of your conference. I appreciate fully the importance of such gatherings, which has been demonstrated by the excellent results obtained from the conferences of collectors of customs, appraisers of merchandise, and special agents, and I am anticipating like beneficial results from the conference of chemists. The gentlemen composing this conference are in charge of most important work and most difficult and technical work, and the department must depend upon the chemists in charge for increased efficiency in their departments, uniformity in practice, and economy in administration. These things are being acquired in other branches of the Customs Service, and I am confident that you are desirous of obtaining the same end in your branch of the service.

I wish to assure you of my anxiety that this conference shall be most successful in every way, and I also wish to assure you of the department's support in your efforts to secure a better and more efficient service. While I regret that I can not be with you, I shall look with confidence for the recommendations which your conference will make to the department.

With best regards, I am,

Sincerely, yours,

A. J. PETERS, *Assistant Secretary.*

FREDERICK J. BATES, Esq.,
*Sugar Examiner, Care of Collector of Customs,
New York, N. Y.*

The second is from Mr. Halstead:

MARCH 4, 1916.

Mr. F. J. BATES, *Examiner.*

MY DEAR MR. BATES: I had intended to be in New York on next Monday morning to meet those in attendance at the Chemists' Conference. Some of them I have never met, and some of them for a few minutes only. However,

both the Secretary and Assistant Secretary Peters are leaving Washington on next Tuesday for an absence of two and one-half months. I think that you and all those in attendance at the conference will realize how impossible it would be for me to be away from Washington at this time. The general purpose of all these conferences is to so perfect our methods of procedure and our organization that the Customs Service will be an institution to which one may be proud to belong.

I know that every person attending this conference has become weary of the incessant slurs upon the inefficiency of governmental institutions. It is not sufficient to draw within our shells and ignore these expressions. We must look about us and see if they are well taken in whole or in part, and if we find that they are not, to boldly deny them; and if we find they are, to correct the deficiencies. As for myself, I have never yet been sufficiently confident to deny the truth of all these statements, and it has been my constant endeavor to put our service in a condition where I might do this. While it is exceedingly probable that our chemical laboratories rank high in their efficiency as compared with other branches of the service, yet it is impossible that they are perfect. Whatever may be done to avoid a waste of effort, duplication of processes, and to improve our methods should be done, and I confidently expect that these conferences will have some effect along these lines.

Very sincerely, yours,

F. M. HALSTEAD,
Chief, Division of Customs.

We are most fortunate in having with us this morning a high official of the Customs Service, and I will call upon Mr. Pickrell to present him to you.

Mr. PICKRELL. Gentlemen, I take great pleasure in introducing to you a man who has from the very day of his induction into his present Federal position taken the keenest interest in the scientific work as conducted in the chemical laboratories of the Customs Service. It has indeed been gratifying to me that I have had the opportunity of serving as a subordinate under him. I take great pleasure in introducing to you Hon. John K. Sague, appraiser of this port.

(Appraiser Sague welcomed the chemists and expressed his pleasure at the conference meeting in New York and also his belief that the conference would be of material value in establishing a higher standard of efficiency in the customs laboratories.)

Mr. BATES. I am sure that the members of the conference appreciate Mr. Sague's kindness in appearing before us this morning on the spur of the moment and that you have all enjoyed listening to him as much as I have.

In conferences of this character it is customary to have some permanent organization not only with regard to officers for the conference but to suggest any changes in matters of procedure and other exigencies which may arise from time to time. As a permanent organization it is customary to have a chairman, vice chairman, and a secretary. I am going to appoint Mr. Pickrell, Mr. Howell, and Mr. McSorley as a committee to bring in a report on permanent organization and any other suggestion which they may see fit to make. While this committee is acting I would suggest that an intermission be declared. I would like to hear a motion to that effect.

Mr. MCSORLEY. I move that we have an intermission of 15 or 20 minutes, or enough time in which to arrange matters.

(Motion seconded and carried. After an intermission of 15 minutes the conference reconvened.)

Mr. MCSORLEY. It is the sense of the committee that the permanent organization of this conference be made as follows: Mr. Bates, chairman; Mr. Pickrell, vice chairman; and Mr. Hynes, secretary;

that the hours of the conference be from 10 to 2 each day without intermission; and that the questions be taken up in the order as stated in the typewritten lists. It is hoped that discussion of the questions may be finished by the end of the second day, the third day to be devoted to informal discussion.

Mr. BATES. You have heard the report of the chairman of the committee. What is the pleasure of the conference?

Mr. CURTIS. I move it be adopted as read.

(Motion seconded and carried.)

Mr. BATES. Perhaps it is superfluous for me to remark that I appreciate very much the action of the conference in making me chairman of this session, and I shall do everything in my power to make the conference a success from every standpoint. Before proceeding to the questions I would like to say a few words regarding them. When the lists from the various ports arrived I was very much surprised to find the unanimity of opinion which existed among the members of the conference as to what were the most important and logical subjects for discussion at this particular conference. There was, because of this unanimity of opinion, a most unusual overlapping of the questions, and I found it necessary to discard the idea of accrediting to each port each question which it had proposed. The procedure which was adopted was to make a sort of composite question, where a number of ports had suggested the same question, which would represent as nearly as possible all the ideas involved. The name of the port which has been attached to each question is not intended to mean that credit should necessarily be given that port for suggesting the question. The question may have been suggested by several other ports.

Question 1. Is it advisable or practicable to establish a sort of central bureau through which information may be distributed to the port laboratories? (Chicago.)

Mr. HYNES. In asking that question I had in mind my own particular need in the case. That need is the need of the aid, advice, and help of members of all the ports in solving the multitude of questions that come up to each individual port. It is self-evident that no one man can be an expert in all of the things that come before the appraiser's chemists. It is also self-evident that if you could bring to bear upon the problems of the different ports the combined ability of the men of the various ports, the problems would be solved and questions answered as far as possible to do so. So that the question presented itself to me in this way: How can I avail myself of the ability and facilities of the assay office in Kansas City on the question of minerals and ores? How can I avail myself of the information on sugar value? Necessarily those in New York would be more familiar with that than the Chicago laboratory. How can I avail myself of the information on tea? Perhaps get it from San Francisco. That was the question I had in mind. It seemed to me that there ought to be some way to so organize the few customs laboratories that this information or information that the various ports may have could be brought to bear upon my individual problems, and that the help of the various chemists could be consolidated and used in solving any problem that I was unable to handle. Take, for instance, the Diamond Match Co. You would say that the chemistry of matches was a very small thing, nevertheless they employ 10 re-

search chemists in the chemistry of matches. They have what they call a supervising chemist who travels around from one laboratory to another, one factory to another, and so this man can bring to bear upon the problems of the Diamond Match Co. the ability and resources of the individual men scattered throughout the country. That is not an unusual thing in the organization of laboratories, of smelting companies, mining companies, factories, and so on. If they can so organize, it seemed a perfectly natural thing to me that the Government laboratories should organize so that the men, as I stated before, in the different ports could be a help to each other in handling the individual questions that come up in any particular port. Of course, in order to accomplish that it is evident that some sort of an organization must be effected; some sort of a clearing house. In a manner we work these things out in a small way ourselves. If questions come up pertaining to ores or metals, I send samples down to Mr. Curtis, of Kansas City, and it is rather gratifying to me to be able to shift the work on to Mr. Curtis, and also gratifying to me to have that question answered in a way that is satisfactory. Likewise a great many of our troubles are "dumped" on New York. I think that is not an uncommon practice. It is entirely likely that the other port laboratories have men especially qualified on metals, or on drugs, or on any one of the thousand things that come up in the customs laboratories. If I knew their ability, it would be of help to me, just as the New York and Kansas City laboratories are. Of course, I avail myself of the resources of the Bureau of Standards, and that has been of great benefit to the Chicago laboratory. If it were possible to have a clearing house so that the information and ability represented in the different ports would be available for each individual port, it would be a good thing. That is what led to the asking of that question. I am very glad it is the first question on the list. I think it is through this that the rest of the things will be solved. Whatever things have been suggested—that we have a manual of official methods; that we have a supervising chemist; that we have this or that—I believe that in order to get any of these things you first must organize as a unit and act as a unit and then the ports will be available for aiding one another. Just how that is to be brought about is a matter of detail, but personally I am very much of the opinion that it should be carried out, and I would like, of course, to hear the opinions of the other members of the different ports. I fully believe this is a question that ought to be settled before other questions are taken up. The rest of them are dependent upon it.

Mr. PICKRELL. I agree with Mr. Hynes. This question is one of the most important to be discussed at this conference. I think the port of New York has had an opportunity to come in contact with the work of the other laboratories more than any other in the service through the C. V. R. system. At various times we have had discussions with Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities through samples sent through the C. V. R. department. Oftentimes the same kind of merchandise imported at the port of New York is imported at several other ports. We know that through the C. V. R.—I recall specifically a case at Philadelphia, a case of cresylic acid. If we had a system or had a clearing house or a central bureau by means of which whenever merchandise coming to the different ports was

analyzed, and a copy of that analysis of the merchandise was put at the disposal of the laboratories of the other ports within a certain period, a week or two weeks, there would then be a tendency to have some harmonious cooperation; and also there should be a means by which samples may be distributed to the various ports. There may be a case where merchandise is received for the first time and probably never will be received again, and maybe another port has more special qualifications and experience in that particular line of merchandise than the receiving port. Consequently an expression of opinion for the benefit and experience of that port would be of great value to the port receiving the merchandise. We have just had a case now upon which we have spent two or three weeks, a case we would like very much to send to the various laboratories for an expression of opinion. The merchandise is called Ho-Madye yeast flour. It came from Detroit through the C. V. R., and we spent a long time on it. I think the primary thing is cooperation; of having a system whereby all the experience and the work of one laboratory may be given to another laboratory or explained to another laboratory; where instead of laboratories being separate and distinct units they would be correlated. We are all working for the Customs Service. We all should be willing to give the other laboratories the benefit of our experience, and by such a system we will all receive the greatest benefits.

Mr. West. Last week a chemist asked me for information about polishing sand. The true polishing sand is used as an abrasive, but San Francisco imports enormous quantities of ground calcite for polishing rice. The price varies according to the degree of fineness. This chemist tried the usual tests, and not being able to identify the material asked if I could help him. Two years ago, in Alaska, there was an eruption of a volcano, and for a distance of several hundred miles a fine white dust was distributed over the country. A Japanese merchant had an idea that he could make some money out of this sand, and shipped some to San Francisco. Chemical tests showed that it was an ordinary silicate, but microscopic examination revealed all the characteristics of pumice stone, and it was returned as ground pumice. It was this same lava dust that was puzzling the chemist.

We are getting enormous quantities of merchandise invoiced as chicle. The Mexicans gather numerous gums and ship them to San Francisco as chicle. They are not shipped to the chewing-gum factories. They contain about 28 per cent of rubber.

I am sure that information concerning these materials would be welcomed by all laboratory chiefs and I heartily agree with Mr. Hynes, we should have a central bureau.

Mr. McSorley. I think it is particularly desirable that a central bureau be established, from a time-saving standpoint. We often get samples of complicated compounds at Philadelphia which require maybe a week or a week and a half to analyze. Now, if we could indicate the analysis we have made on a substance of that sort to all the other laboratories it would save them the trouble, if they got a similar compound, of repeating the work we have done. It might save them a week's time.

Mr. Howell. Mr. Chairman, I only want to register my acquiescence in what has been said by previous speakers. I feel sure that the idea of a central bureau is one which everyone will admit is of great value. It is desirable to establish some kind of a central

bureau, because information to customs laboratories to be valuable must be of a specific character and not the usual routine information furnished to the appraiser at the various ports. Only a central bureau can collect such information. It is practicable because a central bureau must be maintained if the work of the customs laboratories is to be unified.

Mr. CURTIS. Instead of a central bureau would the needs of the department be just as well satisfied if, on the examination by the different chemists or different laboratories, a report be made to each and every one of the different laboratories stating that there was received through the port of so-and-so a sample marked in such a manner, which was found to contain such and such ingredients? I believe the port of New York laboratory has a semi-official list of methods, and that they are contemplating getting up a new one. Reference could be made to this by the port which had sent this card to the various laboratories that such and such a method should be used. This card would be placed in an indexed file under a proper heading; in event of a similar sample being received at one of the other ports reference could be made to that. That would obviate the necessity for the establishment of a central bureau. We all know that the Customs Service is in need of funds. The revenue from imports has fallen off materially in comparison with past years, and the establishment of any division or office which would necessitate increased expense would in a measure be a burden on the Government. I believe that in the event of the question of a new method arising the chemist originating this idea could write to the chief of the other laboratories for the chief's opinion, and on receipt of his opinion it could be boiled down to the consensus of opinion of the different laboratories, at which time notice of that opinion could be sent to each and every one of the laboratories. This, as I said, would eliminate the establishment of a central bureau or clearing house, which is covered by question 5.

Mr. WEST. My idea embraces a little larger scope than mere information for chemists of the Treasury Department. At present I believe we are all furnishing the information required under Schedule E of the Department of Commerce, and I think we all know how valuable these tables will be to us. I think they will be of value all over the country.

The Department of Agriculture publishes a series of cards describing the latest methods of analyses, and they are sent regularly to the different Department of Agriculture laboratories. I spoke to the chief of the laboratory in San Francisco and he has very kindly let me copy these methods. I think that similar outlines of methods should be at our disposal. I have no typewriter. There is one typewriter in the appraiser's department. Personally I would throw up my hands in horror if I had to send copy to all of the laboratories, as Mr. Curtis suggests. It would be almost impossible. If I sent one rough draft to a central bureau they could get it out in manifold typewritten sheets and send it to everybody. They could have their own indexing system there, and I think the source of information would be an elegant one. I have always envied the chemists in the Department of Agriculture their having an official bulletin, containing selected methods and also their official definitions. A central