From Whence We Come (Happy Birthday to Us)

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Ninety years ago, this month saw the publication of volume 1, number 1 of *The Journal of Immunology*. Thus, we pause briefly with this issue to wish ourselves a very happy birthday. And many happy returns? More about that later.

For the past year and a half we’ve enjoyed a look back at seminal papers in immunology in a series published in *The JI* called “Pillars of Immunology.” These papers were generally published between 15 and 40 years ago and have had a particularly important role in shaping the discipline of immunology as we know it today. I hope that you have been enjoying both the papers and the accompanying commentaries as much as we have enjoyed choosing the papers to be honored. But the paper reprinted in this issue is very different. It is, in fact, the very first paper in the very first issue of *The JI* published in 1916—certainly far outside the usual window of time for the Pillars series, but seemingly appropriate for this celebratory moment.

The 1916 article (1) by Dr. Richard Weil, a major figure in early 20th century allergy and immunology, is interesting for several reasons. First, as Weil was the AAI president in 1916, one might infer that the president’s “clout” with the journal at its inception was arguably greater than it would likely be today. Second, it is the 14th paper in a series titled “Studies in Anaphylaxis,” the first 13 of which had been published in the *Journal of Medical Research* (which in 1925 became *The American Journal of Pathology*, the journal of the American Society for Investigative Pathology). Third, the paper differs in two respects from those commonly published today: it has a single author and it is 18 pages long! Fourth (and more substantively), it addresses a question, the relationship of precipitating Ab to Ab responsible for anaphylaxis (termed “sensitizin”), that was not definitively resolved in humans until 50 years later, with the isolation and purification of IgE by (again a former AAI president) Ishizaka et al. in two landmark publications in *The JI* (2, 3). However, interestingly, in using guinea pigs as the model for anaphylactic reactions, Weil had the good fortune to choose an experimental animal in which IgG1 rather than IgE is the primary Ab of anaphylaxis. Unaware of the difficulties that would later surround the identification of the reaginic Ab, he was clearly convinced of the correctness of his observations: “The conclusion seems unavoidable that the [sensitizin] is identical with the precipitin. In any event, the burden of experimental proof certainly rests with those who might dispute this belief.”

Because the entire paper provides insight into the scientific literature (and experimental design and methodologies) of 90 years ago, and we are in a celebratory mood, it is reprinted for your enlightenment and entertainment.

I’m sure some readers wonder why we’ve chosen to celebrate now. Wouldn’t it make sense to wait a decade for our centenary? And why the question mark after “many happy returns”? One reason for a 90th birthday party is the certainty that this editor-in-chief will not be in that role 10 years from now, so I’d like to party now (Joe Feldman’s record of 16 years as editor of *The JI* will never be threatened). But that’s very much a secondary reason for this month’s celebration. A more serious reason is that it is impossible to predict with confidence that *The JI* will continue in its present form into its 100th year. Although I am confident that when a century is completed *The JI* will remain in its role as the heftiest contributor to the international immunology literature (both in physical weight and total intellectual content), the breathtaking rate at which electrons in cyberspace have been replacing ink on paper makes it possible—perhaps probable—that the journal 10 years from now will have a significantly different form from that of today—and certainly from 90 years ago.

So while we contemplate those musty shelves in library stacks, where up to nine decades of research in immunology may be archived, we also think about a revolution in information science that will soon put that entire 90-year archive on your desktop. Indeed, when I was being interviewed for the position of editor-in-chief, I was asked by a member of the search committee whether I thought...
the journal would survive in print. I answered that I thought it likely that it would survive my tenure, but I was much less certain about its fate during the editorship of my successor.

With that in mind, I’d like to solicit your thoughts on what form The JI should be taking when it celebrates its 100th birthday. Should it remain as at present, available with full content both electronically and in print? Might the print version be replaced by a much slimmer volume, containing only a table of contents and abstracts of articles (perhaps with a bit of “front matter” and some advertisements), with the full content available only electronically? Should the printed version of The JI disappear entirely, following the cassette tape recorder as another victim of a digitized age? Or do some of you have a model that we might not yet have considered?

As always, you can write me at eic@aai.org. I’d be very pleased to hear your ideas. . . . and happy birthday to The JI.

Robert R. Rich
Editor-in-Chief

References