

History of the Texas Mosquito Control Association: The first 25 years (1956-1981)

The history of the Texas Mosquito Control Association (TMCA) is very much intertwined with that of the first few mosquito control districts established in Texas during the early 1950's. Suffice to say for purposes of this historical summary, that, if the districts and their programs had not come into existence in Texas, there would have been no TMCA.

As compared with states such as New Jersey, California and Florida, Texas is a comparative newcomer to organized mosquito control. In fact, it was not until 1959 that Texas gave legal recognition to the fact that public funding of mosquito control programs is justified in the absence of mosquito-borne disease activity. The 51st legislature at its regular session posed House Bill 127, which provided for the creation, regulation and financing of mosquito control districts. This action was undoubtedly precipitated in part by some of the interest and activity underway at that time in Jefferson County.

It was after visiting Tommy Mulhern and other mosquito control workers in New Jersey in 1949, that Dr. Paul Meyer of Port Arthur was persuaded to review the mosquito problem in Jefferson County and to make recommendations for its control. Thus, the first mosquito control district was established in Jefferson County on January 1, 1950, with Mr. Al Lafferty as its Director, followed by the second in Galveston County in 1954, under the direction of Mr. William Cox. The Brazoria and Orange districts were formed shortly thereafter, headed respectively by Mr. J.C. McNeill, IV and Mr. Gus Foyle.

It was the interest and activity surrounding these control programs which paved the way for representatives from Galveston, Brazoria, Orange, Jefferson and Chambers Counties to meet in 1955 for the purpose of discussing the idea of organizing a Gulf Coast Mosquito Control Association (GCMCA). One of the principal aims of the proposed association was to interest and assist other coastal counties in organizing mosquito control districts. At another meeting in the summer of 1957, in Orange, to complete the organization of the association, the first slate of officers was elected and began serving. The president was Dr. Don W. Micks of Galveston; President-Elect, Dr. Paul R. Meyer of Port Arthur; 1st Vice President, Mr. R.H. Carter of Vidor; 2nd Vice President, Mr. Jack Norris of Freeport; and Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. William M. Cox of Galveston. The Board of Directors was comprised of Judge James A. Kirkland of Port Arthur, Mr. P.J. Gurklis of Lake Jackson, and Mr. F.E. Williams and Mr. Dick Scurlock of Beaumont.

It is interesting to note that even before the organization of the GCMCA, the American Mosquito Control Association held its first Texas meeting in Beaumont in 1956. However, during this time the meeting hotel was sold and the participants had to be loaded on buses to travel to Galveston where the last day of the meeting was held.

The GCMCA held its first meeting in Corpus Christi on October 26, 1957, in an effort to stimulate further interest in the organization of a mosquito control district in Nueces County. As it turned out, there was an enormous amount of food for a disappointingly small number of participants, and a district was never formed.

One of the important early activities decided upon by the GCMCA at its 1957 Corpus Christi meeting was the annual "Field Day". The first such meeting was held on May 10, 1958, on the Brazoria County Fairgrounds in Angleton with Mr. Jim McNeill, IV as host. This was an occasion when the organized districts and commercial exhibitors demonstrated mosquito control methods and equipment. These "field day" meetings, which typically featured a barbecue dinner, were continued through July of 1965 (except for 1962), were open to all interested persons and were very popular. Their original objective was to stimulate other Gulf Coast counties to establish mosquito control districts and to exchange information concerning mosquito control practices. Annual membership dues at that time were \$2.00 and remained at that level for many years.

1958 was also a year of much dialog and exchange of ideas with Prof. E.S. Hathaway of the Louisiana Mosquito Control Association. Based at the Department of Zoology at Tulane University, he was strongly influential in shaping and guiding the development of the LMCA and its subsequent close contact with what would become TMCA. House Bill 127 as originally passed permitted only those counties bordering on the Gulf of Mexico to organize mosquito control districts, the legislation having been precipitated by the salt marsh pest mosquito problem which was principally a coastal phenomenon. Further, there was a five cent maximum tax valuation allowed. However, within three years of the beginning of the GCMCA, the association began to work and plan toward amendments to H.B. 127. These amendments would permit any county in the state to organize a mosquito control district, setting five cents per hundred dollars valuation as a minimum with twenty-five cents per hundred valuation as a maximum. In May of 1961, the hard work of the Association, aided by Senator Babe Schwartz and Mr. Frank Von Zuben, Chief Engineer with the State Health Department, was rewarded with the passage of the amendments to appropriate sections of the bill.

In anticipation of the passage of the amendments, the Gulf Coast Mosquito Control Association had ceased to exist as of January 1 of the same year with the establishment of the Texas Mosquito Control Association. The constitution and by-laws of the GCMCA were retained except for the name change. The officers at the time were Mr. Christian Vieser, President; Dr. Don Micks, President-elect; Mr. John Pritchard, Secretary-Treasurer; and the Directors, Mr. William Cox and Mr. Peter Gurklis. The name of the new organization was intended to encourage non-coastal counties to organize for mosquito control too and to join the association.

The following year, 1962, was a milestone since it was in March (5-7) that the first joint meeting of the American Mosquito Control Association with the TMCA was held in Galveston. Interestingly enough, the TMCA held another meeting on December 14 and 15 of the same year, the first of eleven consecutive meetings to be held in Austin, as set forth in the bylaws, in the auditorium of the State Health Department. The formation of the National Mosquito Control – Fish and Wildlife Management Coordination Committee in 1960 had stimulated interest in the need for mosquito control and fish wildlife workers to carry out their duties in such a way as to complement the other. At the annual meeting of the TMCA in December of 1962, Dr. Marion Toole, Director of Inland Fisheries of the State Game and Fish Commission, and Dr. Terrance R. Leary, Coastal Fisheries Coordinator for the same organization, gave invited talks on the organization and functions of the Commission. This was the first of several steps to improve communication and understanding between organized mosquito control and fish and wildlife agencies.

The First Gulf Conference on Mosquito Suppression and Wildlife Management was held in Lafayette, Louisiana, November 16-18, 1964. It was a regional meeting of fish, wildlife and mosquito control workers for the purpose of exchanging information and ideas. 1964 was also the year of the big St. Louis encephalitis (SLE) epidemic in Houston. The voting in of mosquito control districts by Calhoun, Harris, Matagorda and Hale Counties in the same year was not altogether coincidental. All except Hale County also voted in district financing. Ironically, Mr. Jim McNeill and Dr. Don Micks, as TMCA representatives, had arranged a joint meeting in Houston in October 1962, with the city and county health directors, Dr. C.A. Pigford and Dr. L.C. Farragut of Houston and Harris County, respectively, to encourage them to support the perceived need for the county to organize a mosquito control district. At that time, there was a little interest but such a move did not have enough priority until precipitated by the SLE epidemic less than two years later.

After the four preceding annual meetings of the association were held in Austin, a change in the by-laws was voted in at 1966 meeting: “The annual meeting shall be held in December of each calendar year in a location designated by the officers of the association.” At that time, the membership of the association had reached 80 and the bank balance was \$629.45. At this meeting, an attempt was made to tape the proceedings for compiling the first printed “Proceedings” but failed. When Jimmie Dickens of the Texas Department of Health was TMCA President in 1968, he appointed Clayton Toalson of the Calhoun County Health Department as chairman of the Proceedings Committee which succeeded in producing the very first of the *Proceeding of the TMCA Annual Meetings*, which have continued to be printed and distributed.

1969 brought the culmination of considerable prior committee work initiated in 1968 when the association adopted the *Recommended Procedures for the Chemical Control of Mosquitoes in Texas*. These recommended methods were intended to serve as guidelines to accepted practices for all organizations involved in mosquito control and those contemplating control programs. Also accepted by the association membership was the proposed *TMCA Policy, Objectives and Guidelines* whose statement was patterned after that of the American Mosquito Control Association. Other accomplishments during this same year were the production of the first edition of the TMCA Handbook and the initiation of mosquito control seminars, designed to meet the needs of mosquito control personnel for newer knowledge about mosquitoes and mosquito control practices. The first series of seminars were held in Port Lavaca April 22-23, 1969; and a subsequent series was present in Longview on May 27, 1970, under joint sponsorship of the TMCA and the State Department of Health.

The VEE outbreak in Texas in 1971 occupied much of the time and attention of TMCA members and cancelled the Association’s meeting and seminar series scheduled for the spring of that year. The regular series of TMCA Workshops, as described later, was then initiated in the spring of 1974. Following a series of ten consecutive annual fall meetings of the TMCA in Austin beginning in 1962, the association decided that changing the meeting location each year might help stimulate a growth in membership. Thus, beginning with the 1972 annual meeting which was held in San Antonio, the meetings have been held in a different city.

The TMCA very successfully hosted its second joint meeting with the AMCA in Houston March 25-28, 1973. During this same year, the need was first expressed for an annual TMCA-sponsored workshop for updating all personnel engaged in mosquito control in Texas, and a committee was appointed by the President to establish a plan. Also in 1973, it was decided that it would be appropriate for the Association to incorporate, but then voted at the 1974 annual meeting not to do so. It is noteworthy that at this time, mostly due to the fine work of the local arrangements committee in charge of the 1973 joint meeting with AMCA, our bank balance had skyrocketed to more than \$4,000.

As noted previously, the regular TMCA-sponsored Mosquito Control Workshops were initiated in 1974, and have typically included presentations (lectures and demonstrations) on mosquito biology, mosquito-borne diseases, sampling techniques, types of insecticides and safety in handling, arbovirus surveillance and other pertinent topics. The Association's strategy has been to hold these workshops in different areas of the state each year so that over time, they would be made accessible to every mosquito control worker in the Texas.

The 1974 workshop was held in Corpus Christi, and subsequent ones have been held each year at various locations around the state save for the years that TMCA hosted annual meetings for the AMCA in Texas. According to the evaluations received over the past few years, these workshops have been well received. They certainly represent one of TMCA's most important activities. In view of mutual mosquito control problems and interests, the 1975 and 1976 annual meetings of our organization were held jointly with the Louisiana Mosquito Control Association (LMCA), the first one in Lake Charles and the second in Houston.

A review of the programs of the previous annual meetings of TMCA reveals that they have been well organized around timely topics. At the 1964 meeting, for example, speakers talked about the *Aedes aegypti* eradication program, the Houston epidemic of SLE and formation of new mosquito control districts. The main topic of the 1967 and 1970 meetings was mosquito control problems related to hurricanes Beulah and Celia, respectively. In more recent meetings, topics have included everything from mosquito biology, FIFRA, etc. to arbovirus surveillance. The provocative title of one 1974 presentation was listed in the program as *The Overwintering of Culex quinquefasciatus*. The Proceedings of these annual meetings have contained summaries of most presentations. What is not included in this publication are the traditional brief, informal reports from each of the district directors which have initiated every annual meeting.

Admittedly, some of the most memorable events took place at the hospitality hours during which a remarkable amount of business was transacted. As a memorial to former TMCA President, Secretary-Treasurer, and esteemed colleague Gus Foyle, the Association established the James Gus Foyle Memorial Scholarship in 1980. This scholarship is intended to promote and encourage research dealing with mosquitoes or other vectors of arthropod-borne diseases. Thus, another progressive step has been taken by the TMCA. Looking back over the first 25 years, it can accurately be stated that they have been most eventful, with the Association taking appropriate leadership and attaining significant stature at both state and national levels.

The next 25 years promise to bring further exciting developments and important contributions to community health. This is the challenge to us all.