

# SCIENCE

Edgar W.R. Steacie:

## Building bears pioneer's name

Chris Mesquida

For the average York student the Steacie Science Building conjures visions of endless line-ups at the York Enquiry Service or the Student Awards Office. For the scientific community on campus, however, it embodies a valuable research facility named in honour of a scientific pioneer.

Edgar William Richard Steacie was born on Christmas day, 1900, in Westmount, Quebec. He graduated in Chemical Engineering from McGill University in 1923, and joined the graduate school in physical chemistry at that institution, receiving his Ph.D. in 1926. By 1928, as a lecturer in the chemistry department at McGill, Steacie had begun his first investigation into chemical kinetics, a field in which he was to become an authority.

In 1939, Steacie, already an Associate Professor of Chemistry was offered the directorship of the Division of Chemistry at the National Research Laboratories in Ottawa. In his new laboratory, Steacie began to investigate different photochemical reactions, particularly photosensitisation reactions.

### Natural choice

By 1944 Steacie's reputation as an administrator was well established, and he was the natural choice for the position of Deputy Director of the joint British-Canadian Atomic Energy Project, based in Montreal.

In 1948, Steacie was elected Fellow of the Royal Society, and the next year he became President of the Chemical Institute of Canada. But the major turning point in his career came in 1950, when he was appointed as Vice-President (Scientific) of the National Research Council. Two years later, upon the retirement of Dr. C.J. Mackenzie, he became President of the N.R.C.

There is a tendency for



Edgar Steacie helped young scientists do research in Canada.

governments to support only work which is of immediate functional interest to them. In modern science, this is a serious problem, since fundamental research is a very expensive undertaking which cannot be adequately financed except on a national basis.

### Research opportunities

Steacie rapidly established strong ties of mutual respect with key government officials, thereby facilitating his negotiations with the federal government. Through his efforts major increases were obtained in the funds available for basic research, and the post-doctoral fellowship programme was extended to the universities,

increasing the research opportunities for young scientists in Canada.

Toward the end of his life, Steacie became increasingly involved in international scientific activities. In 1959 he became a Member of the Faraday Society, and from 1958 to 1961 he served as a Member of the International Advisory Committee on Research in the Natural Sciences of UNESCO.

In 1958 he became associated with the International Council of Scientific Unions, the main non-governmental organization for coordinating international activity in science. He was elected president of that union in 1961.

## SCIENCE MILESTONES

### STEACIE SCIENCE LIBRARY

Jan. 7, 1610: The moons of Jupiter are discovered by Galileo.

Jan. 25, 1627: Robert Boyle born. Boyle investigated the properties of vacuums and gases. Among many discoveries he found that sound does not travel through a vacuum but that electrical attraction will take place across one, and that a gas is compressible.

Jan. 17, 1706: Benjamin Franklin born. In one of his experiments with electricity he flew a kite in a thunderstorm and drew an electrical discharge from the kite string, thus proving that lightning is electrical in nature. The next two experimenters who tried to reproduce his experiments were electrocuted. Franklin lived to invent the lightning rod.

Jan. 19, 1736: James Watt is born. Inventor of the first steam engine efficient enough to be used by many manufacturing industries at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Jan. 22, 1775: Andre Ampere born. Discovered and clarified many of the relationships between electrical currents and magnetic fields.

Jan. 19, 1813: Henry Bessemer born. Invented an inexpensive method of producing steel from iron ore.

Jan. 6, 1838: Samuel F.B. Morse and his partner Alfred Vail demonstrate their telegraph publicly for the first time in Morristown, New Jersey.

Jan. 13, 1864: Wilhelm Wien is born. Explored the changes in the nature and intensity of radiation emitted by black bodies with changes in temperature. Plank hypothesized the quantum nature of radiation to explain Wien's experimental results.

Jan. 16, 1902: Hormones were identified by Ernest Henry Starling. He noted that they were substances discharged by a particular organ for the purpose of rousing some other organ or organs to activity. Thus, "hormone" comes from the Greek words meaning "to rouse to activity".

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