

Introduction

This is the 75th year of the *Annual Review of Microbiology*. Microbiology was the third field chosen for coverage by Annual Reviews, after biochemistry (first volume in 1932) and physiology (1939), and certainly not the last. In the preface to the first volume (1947), the Editorial Committee noted, “With the rapidly expanding interest in the study of microorganisms there has been an increase in the literature of microbiology to such an extent that no one can hope to keep abreast of the advances in the various fields. This is unfortunate because contributions to some specific aspect, applicable to other problems, may go unnoticed for some time.” Needless to say, the problem has only increased with time in the growing world of microbiological research, even though we now live in the age of PubMed, when it is at least possible to easily find all of the papers on your favorite gene or protein. Some of our readers may not remember the world pre-PubMed, but I am afraid I remember spending hours in the library checking the end-of-year index in my favorite journals or hunting through reprints for a vaguely remembered reference that should be included in a paper I was writing. The Committee also noted, “It is intended that the reviews will be critical appraisals rather than mere compilations of the literature.” That is still the case. What topics did we care about then? You can find that first volume (and all the intervening ones) at the Annual Reviews website (<https://www.annualreviews.org>). I note just a pair of article titles from that volume—“Antibiotics” and “Respiratory Viruses.” Needless to say, these topics are very much still with us. That can be said for essentially every article in that volume.

This anniversary seemed like an appropriate time to look back on where microbiology has come from and where it might be going, and we were fortunate to be able to recruit Roberto Kolter to take on this formidable task in his article in this volume. I hope you will find it as informative and provocative as I have, and we are particularly grateful to him for writing this during this past strange pandemic year.

This volume was planned in what now feels like a different era, in a memorable meeting in Hawaii early in 2019, with guest members Edward Ruby and Jue Wang. It was our last opportunity to take advantage of Olaf Schneewind’s irreplaceable expertise. As ever, we are grateful to Leslie Parker for keeping us and our authors on task and improving everything we do, throughout the planning and development of this volume.

Susan Gottesman
Editor

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