

WILLIAM B. SCOTT, FRSC

Alfred Walker Holinshead Needler
1906-1998



Dr. A.W.H. Needler, world renowned Canadian authority on national and international fisheries, died in St. Andrews, New Brunswick on September 4, 1998 after a prolonged battle with failing health. He was 92.

Dr. Needler served as Deputy Minister of Fisheries in Ottawa, and as Director of both the Atlantic and Pacific Biological Stations, Fisheries Research Board of Canada, and as the first Director of The Huntsman Marine Laboratory (name later changed to Huntsman Marine Science Centre) and was actively involved in Canada's international fishery agreements for both the Northwest Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean, as well as the Law of the Sea conferences. His wide experience and calm capability have been greatly missed during the discussions concerning the continuing decline of our coastal fisheries in recent years.

He will be long remembered for the many roles he played in the development of national and international agreements, administration and research, at a time when Canadian fisheries ranked high in the world's marketplace. As Romeo LeBlanc said of him in 1976 "His reputation as a scientist and his immense reputation as a man whose word can be taken and will always be honoured, has stood Canada in good stead when negotiations are difficult and painful".

Alfred Needler was born in Huntsville, Ontario on August 14, 1906 to George Henry and Mary Winnifred (Chrisholm) Needler. His father was a professor of German at the University of Toronto. He received his early education at Upper Canada College (1914-1918) and the University of Toronto Schools (1918-1922) and entered the University of Toronto in 1922, graduating in Honour Science (Biology) in 1926. While an undergraduate, he believed he was destined to be a palaeontologist and had been accepted for 1924 summer field work in Alberta. However, a chance meeting with one of his professors while hurrying to a singing lesson was to change his career course. The professor suggested he should see Dr. A.G. Huntsman, a zoology professor at the University of Toronto. He did so and was offered summer employment at the Biological Station in St. Andrews, NB, and for his first summer worked as a statistician. Dr. Huntsman also asked him to see what information he could gather about the public fishing system of the region - an early launching to a career in fisheries. Alfred Needler became fascinated with the abundant marine life, went to sea whenever the opportunity arose and made a collection of marine organisms as required by Honours Biology students. He worked at the Biological Station as a temporary summer investigator from 1924 to 1928. An ardent cyclist, he once told of riding his bicycle from St. Andrews to Toronto - an adventurous undertaking particularly considering the state of roads in the 1920s.

After graduation in 1926, he registered for a Masters program, studying the life history of haddock, *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*, receiving his MA degree in 1927. He continued graduate studies and commenced a PhD program in 1927 working on the migrations and interrelationships of haddock populations in the North Atlantic. His work was successfully completed and he was granted his degree in 1930. During the previous year he had worked on oyster research at Epperslie, PEI, for the Fisheries Research Board, and became involved in the planning and building of a substation there. By 1930, he had full responsibility for both the oyster research program and oyster culture program of the Department of Fisheries, a position he held until 1941.

The year 1930 was a milestone for another reason, for on May 30th, he married Alfreda Berkeley, daughter of Cyril J. Berkeley of Nanaimo, BC. They subsequently had one son and two daughters.

Dr. Needler's official position in 1930 was Scientific Assistant in Zoology, from 1931 to 1937 Assistant Zoologist, from 1937 to 1939 Associate Zoologist, and from 1939 to 1941 Chief Zoologist. In 1941, 17 years after his first summer employment, he was appointed Director of the St. Andrews Biological Station. During those 17 years he studied and reported on many aspects of fishery research including the life history and ecology of haddock, ecology and culture of oysters in Atlantic Canada, oceanography, and fishery biology in general.

Dr. Needler first became involved in international fishery affairs when he was appointed member of the Committee on Fisheries Statistics, North American Council on Fishery Investigations in 1928, while he was still a graduate student. In the years following WWII there was a great increase of interest in international regulation of marine fisheries throughout the world and Dr. Needler became directly involved in Canada's delegations. He became Secretary to the Fisheries Committee at the first FAO Conference in Quebec in 1945 and a member of the Canadian delegation to the second FAO Conference at Copenhagen in 1946. In addition he served as Scientific Alternate Chairman of the Atlantic Herring Investigation Committee. He was a delegate at the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Conference in Washington in 1949, convened to negotiate the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF).

Dr. Needler received his first real taste of the Ottawa scene when he went to the capital in April, 1948 to serve as temporary Assistant Deputy Minister for two years at the request of the Deputy Minister, Stewart Bates. Dr. Needler had high regard for Stewart Bates, but had retained his position as Director of the St. Andrews Biological Station, spent about one quarter of his time there and wished to return when his tour of duty was completed. He did so in 1950, but in November his wife, Alfreda died after an illness of some months.

In 1949, ICNAF was formally established with its headquarters at the St. Andrews Biological Station, with Dr. Needler as the first Chairman of the Committee on Research and Statistics. He had been closely associated with the development of ICNAF, which was established by Canada and the United States to protect fish stocks in off-shore waters and better manage the fisheries. There were many growing pains associated with its establishment, many of which involved Dr. Needler, and at the same time, pressures were building in Ottawa. The Minister of Fisheries, James Sinclair, considered a full time Chairman of the Fisheries Research Boards was essential. In 1953, Dr. John Kask was appointed to that position and became the person responsible for all Board biological and technical stations, and the one to whom all station directors reported.

The year 1953 was noteworthy from a personal viewpoint, for in March, Alfred Needler married Nina Mae Parker, daughter of Martin and Mabel Parker of St. Andrews. Alfred and Nina subsequently had one daughter and two sons. The following year the Needlers moved to Nanaimo, BC, where Dr. Needler became Director of the Pacific Biological Station. The new Chairman of the F.R.B., John Kask, had decided to switch directors of the Atlantic and Pacific stations; Dr. John Hart to St. Andrews and Dr. Needler to Nanaimo. Irrespective of the reasons given by Kask, Dr. Needler was an obvious choice for Nanaimo because of the proliferation of international commissions in the Pacific region. He had demonstrated exceptional skills as a negotiator and diplomat when working with ICNAF. Now, in addition to directing research on Pacific salmon, herring and ground fisheries, he became deeply involved with the International North Pacific Fisheries Commissions, and six other commissions.

In 1963, Dr. Needler was appointed Deputy Minister of the Department of Fisheries, and the family moved to Ottawa. Here again his experience and skills as a negotiator were fully

employed and he served on many international organizations such as the Law of the Sea Conferences, FAO and of course ICNAF.

At the age of 65, in 1971, Dr. Needler retired as Deputy Minister and became the first Executive Director of the newly established Huntsman Marine Laboratory in St. Andrews, NB. Interestingly, the HML was located on property adjacent to the Biological Station where he had started working as an undergraduate student some 47 years earlier. Also, the Laboratory was named after the man who had first attracted Alfred to a career in marine sciences in 1924. In addition to his role with the new teaching and research laboratory, he continued to serve as Special Advisor to the Minister of State for Fisheries, as Head of the Canadian delegation to ICNAF, and as Deputy Head of the Law of the Sea Conference; an intimidating array of responsibilities.

On May 31, 1976 Dr. Needler officially retired as Executive Director of the Huntsman Marine Laboratory, although he continued to be active in national and international fishery affairs.

Dr. Needler's contribution to Canada's fisheries, fishery administration and the fishing industry given during a period of over 50 years is unique and beyond measure. His activities and professional involvements are so numerous and varied, one could be forgiven for assuming that his life was completely dominated by his work, but such was not the case. He enjoyed literature and art and had a life-long love of music, had an excellent voice and enjoyed singing, solo or in choir. He was fond of sailing, hunting, poker, bridge and was a good story teller. Those who knew him and worked with him remarked on his patience, diplomacy and honesty. John Kask said this of him "He gave me dispassionate advice, no matter how unhappy he was with the situation...and he gave it at any time I requested it."

He authored numerous scientific publications dealing with research and ecology, management of oysters and other shellfish, oyster culture, biology of haddock and groundfish, and groundfish research, and also numerous position papers concerning the many commissions in whose conduct he played an active part.

During his long career, Dr. Needler received many awards: OBE 1946; Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada 1946; Honorary DSc, University of New Brunswick 1954; Honorary DSc, University of British Columbia 1969; the 1973 gold medal from the Professional Institute, Public Service of Canada; Award of Excellence, American Fisheries Society 1977; Chief, Pacific Indian Native Brotherhood 1977; and Member of the Order of Canada 1977. In 1980, a 50-meter oceanographic research vessel was named after him and in 1993 a new residence at the Huntsman Marine Science Centre was named Needler Hall in his honour.

To paraphrase a statement made by Dr. Needler in an obituary he wrote about Dr. A. G. Huntsman in 1973 "His passing leaves a gap that will never be filled in a like manner". Sadly, these words apply with equal accuracy to Dr. Needler himself.

*Dr. William B. Scott, FRSC
Professor Emeritus of Zoology, University of Toronto*

(Author's title given as of the time of writing)