Historian’s Note

The Society of Nuclear Medicine rounds out the first quarter of a century of its existence in 1979. Dr. Asa Seeds, our second president and long-time historian and historian emeritus, sought a nuclear medicine pioneer to present an historical perspective about the very early days of nuclear medicine at the second annual meeting in 1955. Dr. John H. Lawrence, dean of nuclear medicine physicians, was a natural choice to give the after-dinner address. Two decades previously he first had used man-made radioactivity for the treatment of disease when he administered \([32P]\) phosphate to a leukemic patient on Christmas Eve of 1936.

Reprinted here are extensive excerpts from that address (/). Doctor Lawrence shared with the early members present at the banquet some on-the-spot experiences at the time the cyclotron, conceived and constructed by his physicist brother Ernest, was the only significant source of artificially generated radionuclides. These excerpts furnish us with some of the flavor of the state-of-the-art methodology, which now extend back more than four decades. The experiences outlined here had stemmed not only from Dr. Lawrence’s own imagination and enthusiasm but also from those of zestful colleagues who soon clustered around the cyclotron to embrace the new opportunities it provided, and which constituted the pioneering endeavors in nuclear medicine that spawned much of our lore.

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REFERENCE