

Abstract Submitted
for the APR10 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

The Washington Conference on Theoretical Physics: Bringing the Spirit of Copenhagen to Foggy Bottom PAUL HALPERN, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia — When George Gamow was offered a position at George Washington University in 1934, one of the conditions he set for acceptance was the establishment of an annual physics conference at that university, co-sponsored by the Carnegie Institution. Foggy Bottom, the Washington neighborhood where GWU is located, was not particularly known for physics. Gamow, however, wished to bring the “spirit of Copenhagen” to that locale and attract an international group of theorists. The Washington Conference on Theoretical Physics first convened in 1935 and assembled annually until 1947, except for a three year break during the war. Ironically, just like the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Copenhagen itself, the conference was galvanized the most by Bohr’s actual presence. In its fifth, and best known meeting, held in 1939, Bohr stunned the audience when he announced the successful completion of nuclear fission. After the tenth meeting in 1947, Gamow’s focus had been turning from nuclear physics to cosmology, he had begun to work more closely with graduate students and local collaborators and, in light of diminished interest, the conference was no longer held. In this talk I will delineate the successes and limitations of the Washington Conference on Theoretical Physics.

Paul Halpern
University of the Sciences in Philadelphia

Date submitted: 14 Sep 2009

Electronic form version 1.4