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## **THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS (Southern California Chapter APWA)**

### **FOREWARD**

Some conclusions may be drawn from the Southern California Chapter experience. Within a few years of inception, it became the second largest Chapter in A.P.W.A., second only to the combined New York-New Jersey Chapter. In subsequent years, it became the largest Chapter.

Meanwhile, the San Diego-Imperial and Central California Chapters were spun off. Further, these chapters were imbued with the same spirit and activity, which may be evidenced by the many annual awards received from National A.P.W.A. for excellence.

Under the auspices of a committee headed by Southern California Chapter, a book was published. It was widely distributed by the League of California Cities, County Supervisor's Association, and State Highway and received national attention. Titled "Liaison—A Method of Achieving Economies in Public Works," it had a direct bearing on the formation of the Northern California and Monterey Chapters. It opened the vista of what can be accomplished by understanding and coordination between all agencies, public and private.

The California Freeway Act emphasized the need for joint planning, first by cutting wide paths through built-up sections of cities and dislocating the existing grid of streets, sewers and utilities and then through the impact freeways were to have on the pattern of population spread.

That we in our Chapter got into coordination practices early due to freeway construction was fortunate in focusing attention to all the public works planning and construction that was to follow, such as the multi-million dollar Los Angeles Flood Control Program.

Such tremendous public works construction took place that intense planning between all agencies was needed to fit it together, inasmuch as much of these facilities occupy much of the same space.

Proved and specific monel values result from coordination. Mutual understanding starts at the drafting table in joint planning, a practice not at all widespread in days past. It is a must to bring all agencies together.

From the beginning, entertainment has not been our Chapter objective but, of course, it results as a by-product. Information of mere current interest has been left to other media. Rather than education as such, the review of engineering, operational and management practices with much participation among the members was the pattern. Panel discussions of the daily parts of our job, including controversial subjects, shed light on what many have forgotten in the everyday sweep of events.

Many subjects of real interest to the smaller agencies, especially those without specialized departments were stressed to draw in wide participation.

Of the subjects evidencing the most interest and attendance, those dealing with legal relations stand out. Liability for damage from surface flood waters, personal liability, workman's compensation are examples.

The first known outdoor equipment demonstration of actual working operations was held in Burbank for the chiefs to observe and handle machinery. Other areas have duplicated the physical demonstrations since that initial program.

Gearing program subject to draw managers from all agencies involved in public works, large and small, into active participation to study, to discuss problems, and to work on committees may well have been the basis for Chapter success.

Manuals and books issued by these committees, such as the A.G.C.-A.P.W.A. Joint Cooperative State-wide Liaison, and other action groups, has done much to bring us together in cohesive understanding and support.

## **THE CHAPTER**

The A.P.W.A. had a few members and was relatively unknown in Southern California before 1947 but that year a delegation from the Northern California Chapter met in Los Angeles to stir up interest.

Mr. Milton Offner (1) had to leave the meeting but afterwards received a call stating that in absentia he was selected to take on the campaign for membership. Despite Offner's protest, he did accept, but only because he resolved to get the job done as expeditiously as possible.

That was not to be, for he came to realize the great potential for good the A.P.W.A. could accomplish with the enormous pool of untapped talent available in our area, and from that day to 1978 he was actively engaged in A.P.W.A. affairs and it was a very rewarding experience.

At that time, the various public works agencies were not in touch with each other; there was little community of interest, no interchange of plans and projects between all the agencies providing public facilities. Even more important, it became evident that public utilities not only avoided public works engineers in general but coordination of plans and operations did not exist.

The President of AASHTO (2), speaking in Detroit, stated "Public works engineers and utility people have considered themselves as natural enemies; the public utility people go to the politician instead of the public works engineer. This should not be, because they have the same identical objectives."

Another President of AASHTO, before an audience in Miami, echoing this pattern, told of a new hospital erected right where a freeway was planned. He urged joint planning "By men who were able to make commitments as to what should be done and the time to do it."

(1) Milton Offner, Secretary, Board of Public Works City of Los Angeles

(2) AASHTO < American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

It was not unusual in the past for a newly paved street to be cut to install another underground utility. Public Works Magazine published a photo of a newly widened and paved street with utility poles not yet moved and sitting in the roadway; of the contractor waiting to have some facility taken out of the way. In an address a speaker told of a city that authorized a \$10,000 extra to a contractor to change plans during construction because of an unforeseen facility in the way. A utility engineer at this later speech said, "This is nonsense; there is a better way to do it."

A utility reported that the first time it ever learned about a public works project was when a grader or digger cut a pipe and spread oil all over the landscape. These events existed in the era before 1947 as a pattern and cost everyone headaches and money.

Some time later at the National Congress in Fort Worth, Texas, a panel of five directors of public works were discussing the uncooperative results of utility-public works operations. The Southern California Chapter

member (Pasadena) rose to tell the panelists and audience that he did not go along with that at all. "We have an organization that takes care of that sort of thing in my area, with excellent results."

Coming face-to-face with these relationships and being of an imaginative mind and a doer, Milt Offner took action. Enlisting the help of a City Public Works employee, Harry Swearingen, the concept of a chapter of the A.P.W.A. took shape.

Calling together about ten representatives for cities, counties, utilities and consulting engineers, Offner broached the idea of forming a chapter. The idea took hold immediately.

In 1951, the Southern California Chapter was formally started. Mr. William M Henderson, an executive of the Southern California Gas Company, a man of broad experience and distinguished professional ability was the first President. He was a good choice, for Bill was energetic, sincere and dedicated. He inaugurated many new ideas, including the first known outdoor, working, equipment show, demonstrating machines in operation, where the chiefs could observe and actually operated the equipment in its task. He was re-elected each year as President until 1956.

Mr. Harry Swearingen was the first Vice President; Mr. Milton H. Irvine, City Engineer of Riverside, second Vice-President and Mr. Frank E. Randall, Pacific Telephone, Secretary-Treasurer.

Members of the Executive Committee were Verne A. Parker, Assistant Director of Public Works, San Diego; Stanley M. Lanham, Director of Planning, Los Angeles Transit Lines; and J.R. Lester Boyle, Consulting Engineer, Santa Ana. An interested, capable group of experienced men it turned out to be.

Without doubt, Milton Offner was the driving force behind the movement and he continued his drive throughout the years until his passing in 1978. In 1953 Offner was elected President of National A.P.W.A. Milt's concept of bringing together diverse and sometimes opposing interests succeeded admirably.

We should give much credit to the Southern California Gas Company and Pacific Telephone in providing personnel and cost of notices, etc. to permit the Chapter to get on its feet. Everyone pitched in to make the Southern California Chapter the best in the Association. In a short time, it grew into the largest Chapter and prospered even after the San Diego-Imperial and the Fresno Chapters were split off.

In 1954, a couple of men were transferred in their work from Los Angeles to San Diego. They immediately set about to gather a group which became the San Diego-Imperial Chapter. The elected officers were Messrs. Verne Parker, City of San Diego; Virgil Larson, Pacific Telephone; Fred Hix, Jack Davis, County of San Diego.

When Mr. Mike Carozza of Arcadia accepted appointment as Director of Public Works, Fresno, he vowed to organize a chapter which soon became the Central California Chapter. These chapters, best of all, carried the same objectives and vitality as the Southern California Chapter and this is evidenced by the number of National awards earned by the three Chapters.

In the matter of organization, the first several years were directed by a very capable, sincere, and dedicated President, William Henderson. In these formative years he carried the ball practically single handed and it served the purpose well.

In 1958, it was believed timely to delegate chapter operations to committees on the reasoning that committees had two purposes, first to accomplish some beneficial objective. Secondly, to foster understanding among various members with diverse, even conflicting backgrounds and interests. The committee system put together then still stands with a few additions to consider new problems.

An example of diverse interests getting together were the several task forces which set about drafting a Model Street Excavation Ordinance. Over a period of several months, they completed a lasting contribution to the public works field.

The A.G.C.-A.P.W.A. Joint Cooperative Committee is another example of an activity which has produced several top rated Standards Specifications for Construction.

There is no doubt coordination and cooperation between all agencies has saved money, time consuming trouble for valuable employees. Currently there are 21 committees that meet regularly, with occasional subcommittees for special studies. All produce results of benefit and vital concern to Chapter members and committees. For instance, the Uniform Practices and Utility Committee has issued ten publications including the Third Revised Edition of the Street Excavation Ordinance.

Liaison effectively practiced on a continuing basis has resulted in economies that has freed funds for municipal functions which would otherwise be put aside. It has become as routine as any other governmental and utility operation.

One County public works director declared his time spent on a committee, even as secretary, was minute compared to the man-hours involved in going it alone, and the results are better because more expertise and experience are available.

After all, planning means getting together with your neighbor, setting realistic goals and working together toward achievement.

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

In 1955, the A.P.W.A. National Congress and Equipment Show was held in Los Angeles. The Congress sessions were at the Ambassador Hotel, the equipment show at the Shrine Auditorium. An outdoor barbecue for some 5,000 people, members, wives and guests was staged in Elysian Park. It was a gigantic project for a new Chapter but Milt Offner and Harry Swearingen, with a smattering of help, put it over and it was a great success.

The Western Regional Conference and Equipment Show under Chapter auspices was held in Long Beach, May 1962, with headquarters in the Lafayette Hotel where 38 panelists held forth with some 700 members from throughout the Western States. The equipment was demonstrated a short walk from the Hotel, on a bare ground next to the Auditorium. Space rental was held to an insignificant cost and a large number of exhibitors were attracted as well as attendees. Buffet lunch served in the area brought the members closer to the equipment. The whole affair netted the Chapter over \$5,000. Frank Randall was the General Chairman. The Chapter experienced the largest increase in membership of any previous year after the success of the meeting and the proceeds enabled the establishment of the Chapter Scholarship Fund.

The National Congress and Equipment Show in Los Angeles, 1965, drew some 7,000 A.P.W.A. members from over the nation, headquartered at two hotels, Biltmore and Statler-Hilton. The Equipment Show at the Sports Arena was some distance away. The Transit District was most helpful in meeting the logistic problem of getting such large numbers of people to the Arena where the equipment and most of the technical panels were staged.

As a side event, many visitors wanted to see Disneyland. The Chief Engineer of the Los Angeles Airport was a great aid in arranging that air tickets would include a helicopter transit to Anaheim, in meeting the various flights and getting the guests easily onto the copters. Again, at Anaheim, Thorton Piersall welcomed the arrivals with orange juice and ferried them to the Disneyland Hotel. Busses brought them back to Los Angeles later.

One cannot say too much of the manner a very large number of chapters members, and some who were not members, pitched in to make the whole program easy. Perhaps the basis of it all was the spirit of mutual help in working together and having some fun out of piecing the parts into a well run whole.

Mr. John Lambie was the General Chairman. Rank Randall and Lyall Pardee, Vice Chairmen.

The Western Regional Conference and Equipment Show, May 19 – 22, 1974, attracted members from all the Western States. Panelists and speakers were headquartered in the Anaheim Convention Center and Disneyland Hotel. Arranged by Thornton Piersall, General Chairman, and Committee the event demonstrates what a large attendance will respond to a top level program.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

That the Chapter brought together diverse, even conflicting, agencies and members is illustrated first by several task forces which completed a Model Street Excavation Ordinance. This group from public works, utilities and contractors, meeting over a period of several months, published in 1957 the Model Ordinance which is a lasting contribution in the operation and use of streets.

The publication and wide distribution of “Liaison—A Method of Achieving Economies in Public Works” was another concept to have an impact and awakening of the values in coordination not only in California but throughout the nation.

The A.G.C.-A.P.W.A. Joint Cooperative Committee had a large and continuing task. About 1960, Jack Thompson, a contractor and then Chapter President had observed the workings of the National AGC-APWA Joint Cooperative Committee and considered much more could be accomplished on a local, Chapter, level. Mr. Silas B. Birch, City of Los Angeles and Messrs. Tom Sweeney, John Witte and Carl Malcolm had completed Standard Specification #158 from the Los Angeles Department of Public Works. Knowing this, Jack suggested that Si do a like job for general public works.

During these years, the seven agencies of the City and four agencies of the County of Los Angeles, each had specifications, similar but just different enough to require a contractor to study in depth each specification to be sure his bid was okay. This developed a corps of contractors bidding in just one or two agencies and, of course, reduced competitive bidding. The lack of Standards caused heavy inventory in warehouse and on trucks and prevented matching up of supplies of castings and materials.

Birch would see what could be done. With the aid and support of the Chief Engineers of the City and County departments, a staff was assembled with expertise in particular fields with the A.G.C. similarly furnishing experts in each segment the Chapter A.G.C.-A.P.W.A. Joint Cooperative Committee was underway.

In 1961 the A.G.C.-A.P.W.A. Joint Cooperative Committee commenced work on the program to develop Standard Specifications for Public Works Construction which would be suitable for adoption by agencies in the Southern California area. Mr. Silas Birch of the City of Los Angeles was the chairman at that time. Representatives of contractors and suppliers were requested to participate with the public agencies in development of the specifications.

Contributions from the construction industry in the amount of approximately \$12,000 to finance the employment of an engineering firm to coordinate the activities and compile the specifications.

The full committee met at least once a month and subcommittees more often over the next five years, refining, thrashing out, researching, and receiving input from public agencies, contractors, material suppliers, utilities and other interested parties. Most meetings were held at the A.G.C. offices on Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles.

In 1963, Mr. Tom Sweeney of the City of Los Angeles was chairman of the Joint Committee for A.P.W.A. In 1964 and 1965, Erv Spindel of the City of Downey assumed the chairmanship of the joint committee, with Tom Sweeney continuing as chairman of the subcommittee for the specifications in 1964, and in 1965 Si Birch assumed the chairmanship of the subcommittee. In 1966 and 1967, Si Birch reassumed chairmanship of the Joint Committee for A.P.W.A. During these periods Mr. Ed Losch and Mr. Joe Hayes served as co-chairmen of the Joint Committee for A.G.C. Also, during these periods the membership in the committee and subcommittees was continually expanding to include smaller agencies and neighboring counties.

In February of 1965, drafts of the specifications were submitted to the heads of the five major agencies in the Los Angeles County area: City of Los Angeles, County Road Department, County Engineer County Flood Control District and County Sanitation District. Specifications were reviewed by the agencies and returned with comments in August, 1965. In the meantime, the Committee was investigating the best means of publishing the document.

The comments and suggested revisions of the major agencies were reviewed by four blue ribbon subcommittees who were empowered to make final decisions and/or revisions. In January of 1966, the final specifications were resubmitted to the agencies. The new specifications were formally approved by the City Council of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and several smaller cities.

After extensive analysis of various proposals, agreement was reached with Mr. Sam Jaffe of Building News, Inc. for publication of the specifications. In November of 1966, the first edition of the now familiar "Green Book" was published.

Special mention must be made of Mr. Silas Birch, retired Director of the Los Angeles Bureau of Contract Administration, who performed an outstanding achievement in pushing through the consummation of this multi-year project and to the late Jr. Joseph Hayes of A.G.C. who provided invaluable advice and guidance.

The Committee's work has continued on. Every year since 1967, an addendum to the specifications has been issued and every three years a complete new addition has been published. The AGC-APWA Joint Cooperative Committee conducts continual research on new construction methods and materials in order to keep the Southern California Public Works function modern and effective.

The Educational Committee has inaugurated and sustained public works administration, engineering, and construction inspection courses in various local area universities. Grants have been established with a Scholarship Fund and in some cases instructors have been provided.

## **PROGRAMS**

It is fortunate that the Southern California Chapter was organized and had a timely beginning in local coordination efforts. A nucleus of engineers sensed the future was casting its shadow before us. There was the start of what the Chapter was to accomplish. The California freeway Act was to feed the tremendous changes in patterns of life. Vast areas of open land, agricultural or unused, existed in Ventura, Orange and Northern Los Angeles Counties.

In 1950, the Santa Ana Freeway was designed as a two-lane freeway from Los Angeles City Hall to Santa Ana. There was not too much along the route except orange trees. But mid-construction things began to happen, such

as the City of Newport creating itself with a population of 45,000. The road design had to be changed to add a third lane in each direction. It just sort of blew up. This was Southern California.

With the people came pavement and buildings to cover the open land. Runoff waters had to be absorbed or carried away by flood control measures. Sewer, water, gas, power and telephones to be provided. All of which occupied much the same space. Putting it all together was our job. Our members did something about this colossal task.

Daily public works manager are responsible for the design, construction, maintenance and operation of airports, sewer systems, rubbish collection and disposal, bridges, streets, and highways, storm drains, water, gas, telephone, power and all the related services needed for a metropolitan population.

It would be difficult to gather any group of people better educated more widely and practically experienced than the engineers who managed these matters in our area.

The varied responsibilities arise daily in some areas and in other only occasionally. Large cities have the greatest variety and many have specialists for each field such as bridge engineers, etc. Smaller cities and very often the big ones need outside help in the design and construction but here, too, the final responsibility rests in the hands of the director of public works.

The management of streets alone requires broad knowledge and practical experience considering all the many, many public services on the surface, beneath and above the street.

It was logical that some common ground be made for these managers to meet, to be in close association, to exchange ideas, and to better understand the people from different branches inherent in the broad public works field.

An A.P.W.A. Chapter was ideal to meet this purpose and the programs were designed to fit the need. At meetings, panels composed of managers openly discussed practices. Experts in various fields were speakers, from city attorneys, county supervisors, mayors, legislators, financiers, oil and utility executives, engineers from all branches, equipment manufacturers all appeared before the meetings.

In the three decades some 350 speakers covered a wide range of subjects vital to the managers of public works. It is difficult to think of a subject affecting the field of public works in a major or minor way that has not been discussed at least briefly as part of a chapter program.

From the beginning, the key pattern of the Chapter programs was educational and it seems to have stayed that way. While these managers are well educated and experienced and any group of them meeting to solve a problem would come up with adequate answers, the field is so broad and human beings are apt to forget what is stored away in memory. It was felt that the Chapter could provide a service in having programs that would jog the memory and stir new ideas. Subjects of current general interest were left to other media.

Often subjects were set to be controversial. In one instance a panel discussion on the use of non-technical employees in engineering took on a range of subjects. In one case a woman engineer who supervised a staff of clerks using broad gauge tables to estimate the cost of construction projects stirred interest and discussion. With a program of over \$30 million in construction annually the estimates missed the actual total by under 2%. Individual projects wherein the estimate missed the actual by 10% were analyzed and explained in detail.

Perhaps the exceptionally successful progress of the Southern California Chapter has been the result of the special attention given by the Program Committees throughout the Chapter history.

What does the future foretell? Victor Gruen expressed one view. This famous and internationally known architect and city planner visions the city where people work, play and live in compact closeness. Another planner sees the vast investment in automation and robot equipment in industry forcing the use of several shifts and continuous operation to utilize the investment. Perhaps a four day week a shift, wherein workers work, live and play in close proximity for four days and live and play in some far distant place for four days. Auto traffic would set a different pattern. Public works planners may have a new world coming up.