



# **A Boston Fern ... A Gaggle Of Presidents ... An End of an Era ... 1970-1980**

**by Robert K. McCue, SR/WA  
International President  
1977-1978**

It was the best of times -- it was the worst of times -- it was the decade of the Seventies!

The Best ... The 40th Anniversary celebrated in Los Angeles, October 1974, brought together Association Committees, Regional Officers, International Officers, and Chapter representatives who reviewed our past and planned for the future. It was considered the precursor of the 50th Anniversary Celebration to be held soon.

The meeting also provided a forum for honoring founder Frank Balfour, SR/WA, for his 1934 vision of a better right of way profession and for forty years of exceptional follow through. At the banquet President William P. Snyder, SR/WA, presented a Boston Fern to Frank and Clare (who just passed away over the Christmas holidays). Perhaps the Boston Fern symbolized the continent-spanning influence of our Association. Perhaps gift selector Richard Matheny, SR/WA, just liked Boston Ferns. In any event the Balfours accepted it in grateful, if puzzled, gratitude.

The Worst ... The worst of times arrived just five years later when founder Balfour passed away. Our mourning of his death included the sad realization that no longer would his clear view of professional ethics and standards of excellence be articulated in his unique and forceful

way. We would survive -- but for many of us it was the end of the beginning, a sad end and a somber future.

In 1978, an article entitled "The Lucky 2001" appeared in RIGHT OF WAY. The title was derived from the author's calculations that of the approximately 10,000 members, 2,000 were active in chapter committees and other leadership positions. Readers were asked to get involved and make the number a space-age 2001.

Even without the additional one there was an enormous outpouring of volunteer effort on behalf of our Association during the decade of the Seventies. Some remember it as a time of great hope -- great plans -- and more than modest accomplishment. We planned to double the size of the membership, greatly increase course offerings, have \$50,000 in the Education Foundation by 1984, put the Association on firm financial footing, etc., etc., etc. We do have more than the \$50,000 on hand and our education program is really taking off, but we certainly didn't do it all. We did pass on our great hopes to the leaders of the Eighties.

There were ten or eleven Presidents during the 1970's. (Do they start in 1970 or 1971?) In any case two giants, Karl E. Baetzner, SR/WA and Gene L. Land, SR/WA

served with distinction in 1970 and 1971. A midget in name only, George E. Midgett, SR/WA, closed out the decade in grand fashion.

In between, a group of individualistic Presidents left their own marks (scars?) on the Association. For example, President Shaffer lost Executive Director Otis Cross. But Rex more than made up for it by showing up at the Phoenix Seminar with a swell replacement, Rich Matheny. This led to the Punches/Matheny Roadshow where Matheny carried Punches luggage throughout the land, while Dave rang the "bell" before audiences everywhere.

President Synder leaned on people. If they did their job, he was generous with praise. If they didn't, he just kept on leaning. President Riemer dined and speeched his way across the continent. He enjoyed it all except maybe an airline meal or two. President Reid told corny jokes and hummed and sang, while he led a choir from Puerto Rico to Hawaii. In his travels, Bill and Martha set a record for heavy luggage. President McCue (that's me, folks) set a four letter word record and lost Executive Director Rich Matheny (cause was not four letter word fatigue, but heavy luggage fatigue). With help I found a swell replacement, Charlie Fornaci, SR/WA.

President Manning exceeded Reid in joke telling, tied Riemer in eating, and didn't lose Fornaci. President Benson breezed through a great year. However, it did not include combining the Education and PDC Committees. Otherwise, his tour was universally successful. And, that brings us to President Midgett. All decade we said, "Let George do it," and in the end he did.

George and several previous Presidents had an air of pipe tobacco about them throughout their tenure in office. It was provided by dedicated, smooth talking, fast thinking, tennis playing, pipe smoking Philadelphia lawyer Philip S. Cottone, SR/WA. Phil agreed to play lawyer for President Bill Reid at "just one meeting" in 1976. Seven years later Phil finally broke loose from a succession of panicky Presidents eager to smell pipe smoke in exchange for the sage advice of wily Phil. His threat to finally start chewing tobacco did the trick.

If the past is prologue (as some swell dude said), then we can take comfort in a past which included a decade of more ups than downs, more laughs than tears, more love than hate, and for some of us more fun than we had ever had. The Seventies were grand!

Whereas all you sports fans know "You are only as good as your next game", and whereas San Francisco 49er fans have learned one battle cry, "Wait Until Next Year!", and whereas looking backward instead of forward can get you run over by a truck, let it be resolved that all rejoice in the good fortune of having been there when it was happening in a grand decade, then join together in bringing about a better tomorrow.



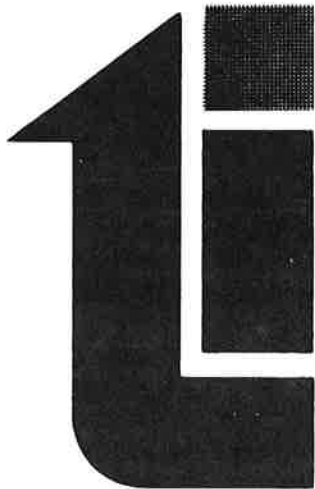
*Karl Baetzner, SR/WA, presenting Frank Balfour a plaque containing seven silver dollars in recognition for seven years of service as ARWA Executive Secretary at a salary of \$1.00 per year. The presentation was made in 1970.*

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