



“The Wonder Years” 1960-1970

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International President
1976-1977**

Sometime ago, a national bakery chain had a TV commercial in which it depicted a child's rapid growth from age 3 to 12 as the “Wonder Years.” Obviously, the growth was better if the child consumed generous portions of its product—Wonder Bread. As we contemplate what the decade of the 60's has meant to our Association, we see an immediate parallel in many ways. These indeed were our “Wonder Years!”

It was a time of great expansion into new areas. Nineteen new Chapters and three new Regions were established. By the end of that decade, we had left the Continental United States and established three Chapters in Canada, had ventured beyond there to Alaska, and continued across the Pacific to Hawaii. The worthy goal of having every Right of Way person within reasonable travel time of a Chapter meeting approached reality. This brought about a corresponding growth in numerical membership. Easier access to meetings attracted greater numbers and made membership more meaningful. The full bloom of construction of the Interstate Highway system, the 7 to 8 percent annual increase in the demand for electricity, the expansion of the communication industry, and oil and gas exploration, all combined to create a need for education and training of new people, which made membership even more attractive.

Companies and agencies often could not keep up with the work load and time demands with their own forces. This led to yet another source of members, the Right of Way contracting firm. These organizations furnished manpower to government and private agencies for negotiation, title work, abstracting and, in some cases, surveying and route location as well.

It was also a time of maturing for the Region concept wherein all Chapters belong to a given Region led by a Chairman and Vice Chairman. This greatly improved 2-way communication between Chapters as well as individual members and International (then National) Headquarters. The Region system also provided an effective means of securing a broad geographic base of representation on the many national committees. More important still was the establishment of the Region Forum and the development of Regional Seminars which could attract larger crowds and more effective programs.

The decade of the 60's was a time, too, for the expansion of the Committee system. Most of the committees we have today had their origin during this decade. The separation of the committee structure into two distinct groups—operating committees and industry committees—began to emerge. Operating committees were those dealing with the

operation and government of the Association, including such groups as education, professional development and nominations and elections. Industry or “discipline” committees included utilities, transportation, and liaison, to name just a few.

Another new leadership direction during this decade was the change to “annual” National Presidents which began in the very late 50's. No one can dispute the magnificent contribution of our founder, Frank C. Balfour, who led the Association as National President from its inception until 1957. But the effect of a different “Man at the Top” each year provided an interesting new emphasis because of the wide variety of talent and direction as well as geographical representation of these executives. The National Presidents during the decade of the 60's, from the late Dan W. Rosencrans of the Los Angeles area, to George R. Watson from Minneapolis, represented nine states from coast to coast and border to border. The diverse talents of these gentlemen parallel the wide geographic separation of their home bases.

There were two particular events or projects during the 1960's that seem of great significance. The first of these was the development of a Policy and Procedure Memorandum by the Federal Highway Administration, then known as the Bureau of Public Roads, covering the accom-

modation of public utilities in public highways, and the policy for reimbursement of utilities when forced to relocate their facilities due to highway construction or expansion. The important thing here was the fact that our Association was asked by the Bureau of Public Roads to provide a task force to assist it in writing the memorandum. Perhaps some today would consider this a form of lobbying. So be it. But in reality, it was the first major instance of our Association working effectively with government to produce a policy which was for the ultimate benefit of all of our disciplines as well as the general public.

Of even more significance was the establishment by our Board of Directors in 1967 of the Professional Development program. This program recognized for the first time that the combination of education and experience, proven by examination, and then demonstrated by excellence, would set apart those of our number willing to expend the effort and time to become Senior Members. After a slow beginning, consisting mainly of the grandfathering of veteran members, the program has now become one of the major emphasis of the Association and has led to dramatic expansion of the education program including many new and revised courses and increased course presentations.

But where do the "Wonder Years" really lead? If we think again of the fastgrowing child, we would hope that the training and nurturing of that period would help him to become a mature, contributing adult to his or her society. Has this happened to our Association? It is certainly a more meaningful and effective congregation of Right of Way professionals than it was in 1960. It has the capacity to train and teach and lead far better than it could then. It is broadly respected by government and industry because of the effective work it does and the excellent Right of Way people it produces. But the jury is still out. Because no matter how well we feed the body or mind of the youth, there is still no guarantee

that the youth will be a lifelong, effective, contributing adult. Let it be our Association's pledge for the future, then, that the continued nurturing through education, professional development, chapter pro-

gramming and the fellowship of just getting together, be the seeds that transform our "Wonder Years" into "Wonderful Years" of success in the future.

Frank and Grace at Headquarters, downtown Los Angeles.



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