

"A SYNOPSIS OF OUR EARLY HISTORY"
PREPARED BY JOHN E. WILSON
FOR THE 1979-80 ANNUAL SECTION MEETING ON FRIDAY, 18 APRIL 1980



Left to Right: Robert H. Meier, John E. Wilson, Desle O. H. Miller.

John Wilson, who compiled and wrote the following history, presented plaques to the above two founders at the 18 April 1980 Annual Meeting in recognition of their foresight and initiative to organize the Quad City Section. Our Section got its start on 1 January 1949 when these men and Wm. L. Denniston (deceased) sent a letter to local ASAE members in which the question was asked, "Do you desire to increase the benefits to be derived from your membership in ASAE?"

The 1979-80 Executive Committee of the Quad City Section, realizing that our Section had reached its 30th anniversary and that a history of the Section would be helpful to the officers and committees of the future, requested the writer to prepare a brief history of the Section.

The purpose of this task is to assimilate the fragmental information located in Section and national files into a single document of history. Our concern is that in time, we could lose some of this information since we have traveling files. The primary objective of this history is to make available information that will be useful in planning the activities of the Section, particularly in planning future programs.

The Quad City Section owes its stature to the group of dedicated agricultural engineers who organized it, to those no less dedicated who have so ably shouldered the responsibilities from year to year, and to all the faithful workers in this Section.

Before 1949, there existed no local organization of ASAE representing this geographical region. Members had little opportunity to participate in any activities, unless they became involved in the national organization. ASAE held its Annual Meeting in Moline during June 1930, but hard times and uncertainty dampened any progress towards the organization of a local society. In June 1930, the ASAE bank had failed and it marked the beginning of several

lean years. Also, the rising unemployment created a deep distrust and suspicion of engineering because farm mechanization was reducing the need for labor on the farm.

After World War II, ASAE, founded in 1907, was beginning its fifth decade. This decade produced the most rapid growth of ASAE, and also one in which professional development and recognition of agricultural engineering attained the most significant progress. Engineers who had been active in ASAE in college, or an organized section, enjoyed and benefited from this type of professional association.

This post war period brought American engineering and technology to the center of the stage. Farm mechanization had become a necessity during World War II because of the enormously increased demands for food and fiber with less available agricultural labor. For these reasons, two clearly defined objectives became the purpose for mechanization of agriculture: 1) to increase the productivity per agricultural worker, and 2) to change the character of farm work, making it less strenuous and more attractive.

The Quad Cities had already become a major center for the farm equipment industries with all its implement and tractor factories. It was also centrally located with respect to many other farm equipment manufacturers in Peoria, Galesburg, Burlington, Ottumwa, Des Moines, Waterloo and Dubuque. There were many engineers and people with technical backgrounds employed at these industries. A majority of these people were directly involved in the development of agricultural mechanization. The time was right for these people to organize a technical society.

Our Section got its start on 1 January 1949, when three local engineers sent a letter to members of ASAE in Western Illinois and Eastern Iowa. The letter asked the question, "Do you desire to increase the benefits to be derived from your membership in ASAE?" These men assumed that the response would be positive, and therefore, made a proposal for achieving this objective. Their proposal stated:

"It has been suggested that a local section of the Society be organized within, say, a radius of 200 miles of the Quad-Cities. Such a section, we believe, would help all members in the area to keep abreast of the latest developments and trends in the field of agricultural engineering, more particularly the farm power and machinery phases."

"In order to determine if local members of ASAE are sufficiently interested to warrant establishing such a section, we, the undersigned junior members of ASAE, respectfully request your cooperation in connection with a survey that the ASAE headquarters office has suggested we conduct for that purpose. Will you therefore please fill out and mail the enclosed questionnaire to the Society?"

"If the survey reveals substantial interest in organizing a local section, you will be notified, and a meeting will then be called to form a temporary organization."

This original letter was co-authored by three junior engineers. It was the beginning for establishing a new Section of ASAE with its central location being the Quad Cities. The three

engineers who founded this Section were: Desle O. H. Miller, William L. Denniston and Robert H. Meier.

On 10 February 1949, they reported that out of a total of 150 letters mailed, 68 replies (45%) had been received. Of these, 56 indicated definite interest in the proposed section. Of the 12 who were not interested, most of them stated they would seldom be able to attend meetings. Also, 45 of the replies (66%) indicated power and machinery as the primary interest.

These men realized the importance of building a solid foundation for their proposed organization. They also realized the importance of getting the support of management to bring this effort to fruition and not frustration. They accomplished both of these objectives by soliciting the help of Kenny W. Anderson, Director of Product Planning for Deere & Company during this time. Kenny was a major force behind the organizational plans. He was an active member of the ASAE Council and understood the need for a technical society to represent this area. In fact, he recently stated the following, "that during World War II, there were many cooperative programs involving industry, armed services, government, and our allies. Sharing technical knowledge was important to survival. This experience set the tempo for the post war period and the obvious need for technical societies such as ASAE". The important policy he laid down at the start was to always make a special effort to balance the organizational leadership to see to it that equalization of company-wide representation was maintained in Section activities.

The positive response received by Messrs. Miller, Denniston, and Meier to their survey question, along with encouragement and support of management, provided the impetus to forge ahead with plans to arrive at a formal organization. After conferring with the ASAE Headquarters, they agreed to call a meeting of ASAE members from the area described, to discuss the proposed Section, and if agreed to by the group in attendance, to set up a temporary organization. The temporary organization would then proceed with the steps necessary to organize the proposed Section. Instructions on "how to organize" were being supplied by Mr. Raymond Olney, the Secretary-Treasurer of ASAE.

They announced arrangements were being made for a dinner meeting to be held at 6:30 p.m. Friday, 18 February, in Parlor A at the LeClaire Hotel in Moline. The price of the dinner with gratuities was to be \$2.50. After the dinner, they held an informal business meeting to consider the matters pertaining to the proposed Section.

As a result of this informal meeting, the local ASAE members requested authorization to organize a local section, to be known as the "Quad-Cities Section". Their request was put into the form of a petition to the Council of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. The petition read as follows:

"We, the undersigned members of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers, assembled at an informal meeting at the LeClaire Hotel in Moline, Illinois on 18 February 1949, hereby request authorization to organize a local section of the Society to be known as the "Quad-Cities Section", the membership of which will be comprised of ASAE members residing in the cities of Moline, East Moline, Rock Island and Davenport as well as those members within a reasonable radius of these four cities who may signify a desire to

participate as active members of said Section." The petition was signed by 22 local ASAE members and 2 prospective members.

K. W. Anderson
Claude W. Walz
Charles S. Morrison
Stanley Madill
Wendell Van Syoc
G. Harvey Shriver
Myran N. Barton
Harry E. Sidles
W. L. Denniston
R. H. Meier
Carl Widseth

Prospective Members:

George W. Haldeman

D. O. H. Miller
Frank D. Jones
R. M. Merrill
F. Stanley Pasturczak
Charles Worstell
C. H. Youngberg
Robert R. Roth
C. K. Beeman
Theo Brown
K. L. Magee
Robert A. Parmele

William M. Cade

The following members were appointed to the organizing committee: R. H. Meier, Chairman; K. L. Magee, and R. R. Roth.

This committee extended an invitation on 21 March 1949 to the local members to attend the formal organizational meeting of the new Quad-Cities Section to be held on 9 April at the LeClaire Hotel in Moline. They confirmed that the ASAE Council had approved their petition for authorization to organize this Section, and that it was now up to the ASAE members in the Quad-Cities and the surrounding area to effect the formal organization. It had also been voted to allow the Organizing Committee to draft the proposed by-laws for the Quad-Cities Section, based on model by-laws supplied by the ASAE Headquarters office. Therefore, a draft of these by-laws was enclosed with the meeting announcement so that members could study them prior to the 9 April meeting. Their invitation welcomed all members of the Society and also encouraged the members to bring guests who were not then members but whom they believed to be qualified for membership.

The following is the program for that organizational meeting:

Date: Saturday, 9 April 1949

Place: Top Hat Room, LeClaire Hotel, Moline

10:00 a.m. Business session for organization of Quad-Cities Section, including adoption of by-laws, election of officers, etc.

11:00 a.m. Panel Discussion: How the Quad-Cities Section May Best Serve Engineers and Industry

- Geo M. Eveleth, Chief Engineer, Rock Island Works, J.I. Case Co.

- Wm E. Knapp, Chief Engineer, Moline Works, Minneapolis-Moline Power Implement Co.

- A. H. Keller, Chief Engineer, East Moline Works, International Harvester Co.

- Carl Widseth, Manager, Steel Building and Equipment Division, Miller-Piehl, Inc.

- D. C. Heitshu, Chief Engineer, John Deere Harvester Works, Deere & Company
- 12:30 p.m. LUNCHEON - Top Hat Room, LeClaire Hotel (\$1.75 per person)
- 1:30 p.m. Introductory Remarks - Theo Brown, Chief Engineer, Implement Research and Development, Deere & Co.
- 1:40 p.m. Address: "What Do You Think" - Leonard J. Fletcher, Director of Training and Community Relations, Caterpillar Tractor Co.

Eighty-five members and guests of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers in Iowa and Illinois met at the LeClaire Hotel in Moline on 9 April to effect the formal organization. At a preliminary meeting of the group held on 18 February, it was voted to call the new section the Quad-Cities Section, but at this meeting, it was proposed to include more territory in the Section than was originally considered. It was the apparent unanimous sentiment of the group that it should be called the "Iowa-Illinois Section".

The meeting of the new Section opened with a business session, which included adoption of by-laws to govern the Section and election of officers. The first officers of the new Section, elected on 9 April, included Chairman, Robert H. Meier, Engineering Department, John Deere Harvester Works; Vice Chairmen, George M. Eveleth, Chief Engineer, Rock Island Works, J.I. Case Company and Robert R. Roth, Engineering Department, Moline Works, Minneapolis Moline Company; and Secretary-Treasurer, Richard K. McConkey, Sales Engineer, Timken Roller Bearing Company.

Following the business session, the group listened with a great deal of interest to a panel discussion on the subject, "How the Iowa-Illinois Section May Best Serve Engineers and Industry". The panel speakers included: George M. Eveleth, Chief Engineer, Rock Island Works, J. I. Case Company; William E. Neff, Chief Engineer, Moline Works, Minneapolis-Moline Company; Arthur H. Keller, Chief Engineer, East Moline Works, International Harvester Company; Carl Widseth, Manager, Steel Building and Equipment Division, Miller-Piehl, Inc. and D. C. Heitshu, Chief Engineer, John Deere Harvester Works.

Following the luncheon an inspiring address entitled, "What Do You Think?", was given by Leonard J. Fletcher, Director of Training and Community Relations, Caterpillar Tractor Company. Mr. Fletcher challenged the group, both as agricultural engineers and citizens, with respect to the type of thinking they do and its relation to the future progress and stability of our country.

Mr. Fletcher was carefully chosen for this task as main speaker at the first official Section meeting. He was the 25th President of ASAE in 1931-32, and rated as one of ASAE's outstanding philosopher - presidents. Fletcher scorned the notion that unemployment was the fault of engineering, and during the difficult times of the depression attempted to relate agricultural engineering to the crisis. Even after the New Deal when the interest in large scale farming fell by the wayside, Fletcher continued to defend the mechanization of farming. He seldom minced words, and was quoted in January 1936, as having said:

"We have developed the machine. It is possible to have a better existence through its displacement of human toil. Our civilization is built upon it. If anyone just cannot stand it here with our machines, he can find places in the world where there are none. I prescribe therefore, for such cases, a one-way ticket. There will not be much demand."