

History of the Early Years of the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board

I do not know when the Engineers of Minnesota first endeavored to bring about a co-operative spirit among the members of the various branches of the profession, but I recall that in 1912 Frances E. Shenehon, then Dean of the College of Engineering and Architecture, University of Minnesota, in a talk at a banquet of the Minnesota Surveyors and Engineers Society urged the desirability of an organization, through which all of the various branches of the profession might act as a unit in those larger affairs affecting their professional and social life, and this was the beginning of an active movement to form some all inclusive organization. An attempt was made to build up the Minnesota Surveyors and Engineers Society and make it a real State Organization. I accepted the Secretary-ship of this State Society and worked for two years for something that could not be brought about at that time. One of the stumbling blocks was the objection of Engineers entering an organization composed largely of that class of men skilled in the art and science of measurement, but not in the real sense of the word "Engineers."

I do not know who first conceived of the idea of the "Minnesota Joint Engineering Board", but it will interest you to know that late in 1915 Mr. E. T. Street, then President of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, called the meeting, the out-growth of which was the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board. I think there were six men present at the luncheon meeting, the President or Chairman of five Engineering Societies and also a representative of the University of Minnesota. A sort of voluntary committee was organized without rules or by-laws to meet and talk over inter-society relations without authority but with simply a voice to be heard on matters pertaining to the common good. It was not long however, before the great possibilities of such a committee with some power to act given them by their constituent societies became apparent and a constitution was drawn up and the name "Minnesota joint Engineering Board" was selected, and each member went before his organization and asked for the ratification of that constitution. The membership of the Board was arbitrarily determined as being the President or Chairman of each of these societies, January 1, 1916. Six societies ratified it by August 1916 and in September the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board became a thinking concern. Article II of the constitution read as follows:

"This Board is formed to secure more effective co-operation among Engineers for the welfare of the profession, to correlate the work of the different Engineering Organizations for unity of action and for "betterment in the standards of practice and greater recognition of the Engineers before the public."

The following notice was then sent to twenty-one technical journals throughout the world by Mr. Geo. Rathjens, Secretary of the Board.

" The Engineers of Minnesota, U. S. A. believe that through the co-operation of the various Engineering Societies they can be more useful to the community and are attempting to bring about closer co-operation through the formation of the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board. The societies represented on this Board are the Northwestern Association of the members of the American Society of Civil Engineers; Minnesota Section of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers; the Minnesota Section of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers; the Minnesota

Surveyors and Engineers Society; the Engineers' Club of Minneapolis and the Engineers Society of St. Paul.

It is hoped that through the central organization the activities of the Engineers of Minnesota may be more closely correlated and more accomplished for the public welfare. "

This publicity brought forth a protest from the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the representative of the Minnesota Section resigned on the grounds that his membership on the Board did not conform to the constitution of the National Society. The Board was without representative of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers for several months until the National Body by a change in its constitution and by-laws made possible such membership.

The Board was gradually strengthened as time went on by the taking in of other organizations until there were eleven Technical Societies represented on the Board; the latest acquisition being the Minnesota Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

As the Board proceeded to function some doubt arose in the minds of the more conservative members as to their authority and it was decided to call a meeting of three representatives from each organization; these representatives to be chosen from the governing board of their representative organizations. This meeting was held at the Radisson Hotel, January 12th, 1917 and it was a notable meeting. Twenty-five were present and every man there spoke to the question

" Are you in favor of the Joint Board,
and what authority do you want your
representative to have. "

There was not a dissenting voice to the first question " Are you in favor of a Joint Board "; there was neither a negative or a passive answer to this question, all were positive. As to the second; necessarily there were various opinions and divergent views, radical, conservative and ultra-conservative. To illustrate the latter it was suggested by one gentleman that the Joint Board prepare a prospectus of their general plan of work and what they hoped to accomplish during any year and each representative submit this to the Board of Directors of his society in order that they might discuss it and instruct their delegate how to act in each case before the Board; this, however, was the ultra-conservative view; the consensus of emergencies. It is a fact, however, that during the years that followed two members, the representative of the Northwest Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the representative of the Engineers' Club of Minneapolis were at least extremely conservative, preferring to get the opinion of their organization before taking a stand at the Board meetings. All of the other representatives, however, have generally felt free to act on all matters that have been presented to the Board. It might be said, however, that very few emergency acts were necessary; usually there was ample time for discussion and consideration at least over the phone with member of the various societies.

Late in 1918 the question of strengthening the Board by additional representatives or by the organization of a state Society of which the Board would become the Board of Directors and Officers was given some consideration. Later a call was sent out to all of the affiliated societies

to present their views on how the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board might be strengthened. A suggestion to organize the Minnesota Polytechnic by P. E. Stevens of St. Paul was taken up by a committee of the Engineers' Club of St. Paul, and a scheme plan worked out for the united Engineering Societies of Minnesota, and a general meeting was called February 13th, 1919, at the St. Paul Hotel to discuss inter-society relations and the proposed new organization of which the Minnesota Joint Engineering Board would become the Board of Directors and Officers. There were three representatives of each of the affiliated societies and the results of that meeting were that the organization scheme was not approved, but recommendations were made that the Board be strengthened by having three members of each society instead of one. At this meeting Mr. L. P. Wolff expressed the wish that the Board arrange a plan to provide a minimum fund of \$5000 for its expenses and activities. Mr. R. D. Thomas stated that each individual member could and should pay \$5.00 each for the support of the Board. My personal views are that the voting down of the organization scheme was due to a lack of understanding on the part of the delegates, notwithstanding the fact that an educational campaign had been conducted and the plan had been published in the Bulletin and reprints furnished all societies for distribution, in order that a thorough understanding of the organization might be had.

At the next meeting of the Board they voted down the suggestion of having three members from each society. The records of the Board showed that there had never been a meeting of the Board at which all societies were not represented, and they believed this due to the fact that each member felt the responsibility of being present at every meeting, in order that his society be represented and if there were three members from each society it would result in a laxity, which would soon destroy the splendid record. It was pointed out that with prospective societies coming in there would soon be thirty three members on the Board, and as it is well known that results always depend on the action of a small body the enlargement of the membership would make it less easy to reach decisions and would also tend to diminish the activities of the local societies by throwing the burden of the work on the Board. The Board, therefore, weathered all suggested changes, and it may also be stated that it had been supported to such a degree as to really prevent its natural evolution into a larger State-wide organization of affiliated Societies, although such a federation was but a probable and natural out-growth. This was the situation at the beginning of 1920.

Now as to the work of the Board; the first work late in 1916 was an attempt to get a Citizens Military Training Camp at Fort Snelling and to secure an Engineers Section of this Citizens Camp. The same year it took an active part against the request of the League of Minnesota Municipalities that the Board of Regents at the University of Minnesota employ a Consulting Engineer to give his services free to the League members. It took an active part in 1917 legislation, worked against the bill limiting compensations of Engineers on Public Works and for a Department of Public Domain as approved by Governor Burnquist.

It was responsible for the appointment of the State Board of Health of two Engineers, Mr. L. P. Wolff of St. Paul and Mr. J. Cappelen of Minneapolis. Prior to this time the Board members always been Doctors, and

an educational campaign was necessary convince the Governor that an Engineer was versed in sanitary science. It has worked consistently and with tact for the appointment of an Engineer on the Board of Regents at the State University and will undoubtedly be successful within a very short time. It put a stop to the sending out of a questionnaire by the League of Minnesota Municipalities relative to sanitary matters in the State, the expense of which was to be paid out of State Funds, all of this information being available in the Engineering Division's records of the State Board of Health.

It arranged for a representative meeting of leading Engineers to meet with Mr. Alfred D. Flynn, Secretary of the Engineering Council in August, 1918, sixty of the leading members of the profession were present at a dinner at which the Engineers' Club of St. Paul acted as host.

It put a stop to the pernicious activities of one of the Engineers at the State Agricultural College, who was an employee of the State and was doing more drainage work than any Consultant Engineer, and pointed out the line of demarcation between what a professor should do and what he should not do in competing with Engineers who maintain their own offices.

During the 1919 session of legislature it went before committees and before the House of Representatives in a fight to have the revised drainage laws, which created the position of Commissioner of Drainage and Water, provide that said Commissioner be a trained Civil Engineer, and won out.

It made a particularly strong fight to obtain an appropriation for completing the topographic mapping of the State and also assisted in getting an appropriation from Congress for carrying out this work throughout the United States. The names of three Engineers were placed before the President through secretary Tumulty by personal representative of the Board to succeed Mr. Tawney of Winona on the International Joint Commission. In 1919 they carried on an active campaign to help put over the National Department of Public Works; this involved a great deal of work and correspondence.

It also carried on an active campaign through members of Congress to enact special legislation providing for the use of the water power at the high dam without longer deferring action in anticipation of the general legislation on that subject. It protested against the clause in the water power bill which had been added to it in committee, making the Managing Director a War Department Engineer. It was pointed out to our Congressmen that there were throughout the West, Civil Engineers of such wide knowledge relating to water power, far more than any War Department Engineer could possibly have, that this clause in the bill was reactionary.

They prepared a Registration law for Engineers, Architects and Land Surveyors, a modification of Engineering Council's Registration Law to suit local conditions and laws. This represented an enormous amount of work. They also were successful in convincing the Architects that there should be but one law covering the registration of members of the two professions. It took a definite stand before the Board of Regents of the State University on the matter of having an Engineer at the head of the College of Engineering and Architecture after the resignation of Lawder W. Jones, and finally assisted the organization committee of the Minnesota Federation of Engineering and Architectural Societies in drawing the constitution under which the Federation now operates, our W. C. Armstrong being the moving spirit of the Federation plan.

This in a hurried way covers some of the outstanding subjects taken up by the Board during its existence. It is incomplete for it does not touch upon or express the ideals, enthusiasm, the earnestness of purpose of the individual members. The Board possibly has not been a "taking" thing with the rank and file of the profession for the reason that with one representative from each society and representative dealing usually with the Board of Directors or the Governing body of his organization he has not appeared to be in touch with the rank and file of the membership. This is a mistaken idea, for one cannot hold a position as a representative of an intelligent and active body of men without feeling the necessity of keeping closely in touch with them. This in fact, was one of the outstanding reasons for forming the affiliation of Engineering Societies, as each individual member of each organization would then feel that he is a part of the larger organization; at least that was the theory on which organization has been worked out.

The board has never featured its work by any publicity, a great deal of it in fact, is quite persistent and effective action that cannot be advanced by publicity, but the moral effect of its existence and the slow but sure results of its work have blazed a trail in Minnesota, making for the advance of the Engineering profession.

Written by

George H. Herrold

This copy of a brief history of Minnesota Joint Engineering Board was scanned, processed through OCR software, and re-composed in MS Word by Jim Mosner in February 2004. The vintage of this history is unknown, but is thought to be from around 1920, as the author was one of the Board's first Secretary-Treasurer as well as he was the Federation's first Chairman of Public Affairs Committee.

Founding Member Societies of Minnesota Joint Engineering Board:

- American Institute of Electrical Engineers, Minnesota Section (AIEE)
- American Society of Civil Engineers, N.W. Section (ASCE)
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Minnesota Section (ASME)
- Engineers Club of Minneapolis (ECM)
- Engineers Society of St. Paul (ESSP)
- Minnesota Surveyors & Engineers Society (MSES)

Founding Member Societies of Minnesota Federation of Engineering and Architectural Societies:

- American Institute of Architects, Minnesota Chapter (AIA)
- American Institute of Electrical Engineers, Minnesota Section (AIEE)
- American Society of Civil Engineers, N.W. Section (ASCE)
- American Society of Heating & Ventilating Engineers, Minnesota Section (ASH&VE)
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Minnesota Section (ASME)
- Duluth Engineers' Club (DEC)
- Engineers Club of Minneapolis (ECM)
- Engineers Club of Northern Minnesota (ECNM)
- Engineers Society of St. Paul (ESSP)
- Minnesota Surveyors & Engineers Society (MSES)