

Spectrum History Corner Article: by RW Simmons, CSI, CDT

As part of the History Corner series I wanted to share the next four articles on the History of CSI as recorded and written by Walter Damuck, FCSI, AIA. This history has been shared with other regions for publication to show where we came from in 1947 and our expansion across the country since.

CSI in the Beginning Part 1 of 3

Prior to World War II, society and the process of construction was very different from what we know today. Keeping the story short, WWII's technological advancement forced drastic changes in the burgeoning construction that was its aftermath. New materials, demands for skilled workers who weren't there and cutthroat competition (frequently unscrupulous) created conditions that specifications of that time were not able to cope with.

The simply phrased specifications that only indicated intent (based on the expected pride of workmanship and integrity of the contractor [with nary a thought of loop holes or substitutions]) were GONE. The specs were very weak in organization making it difficult to find what you wanted. The arrangement of the subject matter was at the architect's whim as were the number of divisions (Most specifications had over 90!). Some specifications were arranged to follow the construction process from "Site Clearing" to "Painting"; other were bound in alphabetical order of the concerned activity; and still others tried to keep all the related activities grouped (framing, lathing and plastering).

In early 1947, government Specification Chiefs started complaining about the different practices among the agencies as well as their consultants. A Treasury Department Architectural Chief thought of forming a group of people, who prepared and used specifications, who would bring order out of chaos in construction communication. In **September**, a meeting of architects, engineers and other in construction disciplines interested in standardizing specifications agreed to form a group known as **The Construction Specifications Institute**. The intent was that business and technical matters would override social aspects.

The toughest job in this formative year was to establish a structure for the "Institute" that would promote growth from the whole nation and develop objectives that would encourage membership. These had to be realistic and far reaching enough to endure without change. The six settled on were:

1. Provide a forum for exchange of information among government and non-government people physically and technically involved in the construction industry – with the objective of improving the quality, clarity, and technical validity of construction specifications;
2. Develop a greater appreciation of the value of the specification as a construction document;
3. Cooperate with, rather than compete against, existing organizations in related fields of endeavor thereby avoiding duplication of work;
4. Interest scholars from architectural and engineering schools in developing practical courses in preparing construction specifications;
5. Develop a means for circulating building research information acquired from valid sources;

6. Develop and maintain current background information on construction materials and methods applicable to construction specifications.

Given this, it was foreseen that CSI's growth must be in an orderly manner, if not, it would enter into areas for which it was not suited. So, concurrently it was determined to define what CSI should not do:

- Establish any semblance of a specification writer's union or similar pressure group interested primarily in self-advancement;
- Emphasize pre-written specification material at the expense of promoting basic principles and suitable background information underlying specification preparation;
- Engage in public lobbying or political activities;
- Attempt to establish the new organization as a super-authority in evaluating construction materials.

The **Certificate of Incorporation** was signed on **March 8, 1948** and filed in Baltimore MD eleven days later. On April 5, 1948 the new 45-member-strong organization had its first official meeting at which Officers and Directors were elected, bylaws adopted and Washington DC was designated as its location.

The bylaws established the types of membership as Active and Associated (which was changed to Industry, a classification that restricted leadership assignments). These members resented their position of financially supporting the Institute without voice representation and made it an issue through resolutions at several Annual Conventions. Today's classifications of **Professional, Industry, Associate, Intermediate, Student, Retired, Emeritus, and Honorary** are more representative of our times. Regardless of the designation, emphasis had been and still should be "Active." We cannot help ourselves, each other, a Chapter, the Institute, and the industry in general without active members.