

*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, Honorary Member, 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 grows: Part Two of Three:**

The first President of CSI wanted CSI to be a clearing house where members could send Specification ideas they were willing to share with other members.

The **goals** were:

1. Better Specification writing;
2. Simpler Specifications;
3. Standardization of building codes and specifications for public works by all levels of government; and
4. Study of new materials and processes developed during WW II to fit them into the construction picture, at that time, as substitutes or improvements on costlier and scarce materials. ["Or Equals" were noble then but anathema today.]

A \$ 5.00 fee was all that was needed to establish membership in CSI.

That was the only income CSI had which didn't begin to cover the expenses for what they wanted to do. So in May of 1953 dues were raised to \$ 10.00 for Active Members. Most of this money went to publishing and distributing the magazine. The new infant CSI needed a lot of volunteerism.

No single person did more for this Organization than HARRY C. PLUMMER. From Board Member in July of 1950 to Secretary/Treasurer and Executive Director, without pay until June 1962. His interest and enthusiasm for CSI spurred its development to 45 Chapters. The May 1950 CONSTRUCTION SPECIFIER carried an article stating: "If the intent of the founders is to be realized and each member is to benefit accordingly, the formation of chapters should begin now!" **New York City** [Chapter 001] was **chartered on 22 May 1951**; 3-1/2 years after the Institute's first meeting. Because Washington, D.C. was CSI's Headquarters the need of a local chapter was not evident. Then the difference between running a clearinghouse, publishing and planning growth plus the nitty-gritty work of what was planned for chapters was realized. In November 1952, 23 members met submitting a formal application for a Chapter charter, it was granted in April 1953 to DC Metro [Chapter 002]. The same day a charter for Chicago [003] was also issued. Four months later Los Angeles joined the group [004], they are credited with producing CSI's first technical program on "Lathing and Plastering", a major contributor to finalizing the CSI Format. The chapter was also responsible for the first CSI Academic Program as a regular credit course in specification writing at Pasadena City College. Now CSI was growing from coast to coast!

Thirteen months later San Diego [005] and Sacramento [006] joined. Exactly a year later San Francisco became [007], followed in 2 months by Metro Detroit [008]. **Boston** [009] came in **February 1956** with 126 Charter Members making it the largest in the country for some time;

being followed 4 months later by Cleveland [010]. Today the Institute has 142 chapters and over 18,000 members across the 50 states, Puerto Rico and Mexico. **Vermont** is Chapter #103.

The first issue of the CONSTRUCTION SPECIFIER became the catalyst for CSI's Technical Programs. The First issue of CONSTRUCTION SPECIFIER [10/50] started a series of articles entitled "Specifications Clinic". In the "Clinic" articles a specification by an anonymous writer was presented. A committee reviewed the document, commenting on its merits, offering criticism on areas needing improvement. The first attempt at information exchange became the embryo for CSI's Technical Program. On a very small scale (due to lack of funds) they were sent out to architects, engineers and other professionals in related fields.

Despite the initial thrust to function as a national body, the first technical programs were for local use. Chapters developed specifications based on materials, processes, trade practices and codes reflecting their own geographical surroundings and subordinated to local codes and practices.

Technical activity at the national level began for CSI when a National Technical Documents Committee was created. This grew out of a Technical Research Committee of the San Francisco chapter whose work symbolized what CSI was looking for from its members: initiative, involvement and dedication.

In October 1956 a report listed five **objectives** for the National Committee. The objectives were:

1. To promote leadership by the CSI in all matters pertaining to specifications and improve specification practices in construction and allied industries;
2. To provide samples to organizations for the evaluation and editing of Chapter Committee technical work;
3. To provide liaison with national professional societies, trade and manufacturing groups, and others interested in the development of specification writing, new techniques, methods and standards;
4. To collect and disseminate chapter information of laws pertaining to bidding procedures, on decisions of labor groups relative to jurisdictional matters and on court decisions affecting the construction and allied work.

The report noted. "To properly carry out the work of the Technical Committee a small permanent, paid staff, of competent persons located in the National Headquarters will be required. It is recognized, however, that presently this is not possible. In the meantime, the work must be carried on by a volunteer group working through the medium of correspondence." This committee was in the process of writing today's Narrow and Broad scope of Guide Specifications.

**The primary objective of CSI was, and is, to advance construction technology** [application of knowledge to achieve practical results in the assembly of components] **through communication** [exchange of information], **education** [imparting knowledge and skill], **research** [fact finding inquiry and investigation] **and service** [providing benefit to others]. (*In fact somewhere around 1970 there was consideration of renaming CSI to THE CONSTRUCTION COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE – obviously it didn't fly.*)

Unlike other trade oriented organizations the CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATIONS INSTITUTE is horizontally, not vertically structured. It draws its memberships from anyone who prepares, uses, interprets, or is interested in specifications for work including Owners, Developers, Property managers, Plant Engineers, Attorneys, Architects, Engineers, Specialized Consultants, Specifiers, Testing Lab employees, Contractors, Construction Managers, Sub and

Specialty Contractors, Estimators, Product Manufacturers, Manufacturer' Reps – and oh yes!  
Governmental Agencies; isn't this where it all started?