

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

Paper presented by

Richard W. Osborn, Fellow
Chairman 1970-73; 1977-79

Establishment and Purpose of The Academy of Electrical Contracting
April, 1980

ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE OF THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

It was during the years that I served as president of the National Electrical Contractors Association that discussions were held which led to the forming of the Academy of Electrical Contracting.

It was recognized that ex-officers were "very ex."

All this talent given to the industry for many years was suddenly gone! No formal way to call upon these giants of the electrical contracting industry existed. An officer was, in effect, put out to pasture.

Was this the reward for service to an industry? Was this fellowship of industry leaders to fade away forever? Surely the knowledge of these individuals was even more valuable than ever. They should be forever a source of judgment and know-how. What could we do?

It was realized during the early planning and research that there was good reason to include others whose contributions were beyond normal duty and loyalty in this recognition and mobilization effort.

The NECA staff studied and analyzed the situation to find answers that would form the basis of this creative effort. It was no small task and, many times when success seemed near, a new thought developed that required a new approach. The emphasis was to achieve a high degree of scholarly professionalism.

The Board of Governors authorized the establishment of The Academy of Electrical Contracting in Philadelphia on October 11, 1968.

The following week the Academy held its first meeting in Philosophical Hall, Independence Square, Philadelphia. The Founding Fellows consisted of sixty-five members under the chairmanship of NECA's immediate past president, Harold Webster.

Who Were These People? Also, Who Are These People?

Some have since passed away. Some are retired or semi-retired, and some are still active in the business of electrical contracting.

What Was Their Background?

They have bored holes in wood joists, installed porcelain tubes in those holes, and "fished" an insulated conductor through the tube.

They have hand fired a pot-bellied stove, swept the floors, picked up and delivered plans, selected and delivered materials and tools.

They have designed wiring systems, estimated costs, signed foolish contracts.

They have made money, lost money, and also gone broke.

They have employed hundreds of people or maybe only a few; negotiated labor agreements, swallowed hard-to-overcome helplessness on a job going badly; borrowed money, floated loans, mortgaged their homes; worked six and sometimes seven days a week; become unwilling partners in financing the general contractor. They have suddenly found themselves in business with a non-paying client.

They have assumed the highest risk, guaranteed everyone's products, and put money on the line saying they knew the code (in this they are unique).

They are civic leaders, politicians, service organization participants, Boy Scout and church leaders, college, school, and bank directors. They have supervised electrical installations in foreign lands, across deserts and mountains. They have wired skyscrapers, bridges, stadiums, boats and ships.

All and much more have fallen within the accomplishments of the Academy Fellowship.

They returned a part of their gain to the industry they cherished by leaving business earning opportunities to serve at the local, state, regional and national levels on various committees and task groups; provided trade association leadership; and risked much to serve on labor-management groups. They have given much of their leisure time to teaching, speaking and promoting the electrical industry. The American businessman is without peer in this type of activity anywhere in the world today!

These men have suffered the anguish of our industry, too. Low bids brought on by errors, humiliation at the hands of labor, clients who were not qualified to be anyone's customer.

These men have continued the spirit of the earlier Americans who helped a neighbor raise a barn, gather a crop, or took time to "sit up" with a sick neighbor as neighbors' problems were also the community's problems.

We have been part of an ever-changing heritage. If, in passing through this wonderment we call the Electrical Contracting Industry, we feel a sense of achievement and reward, think of those yet to come who will have a greater opportunity.

Future Fellows will be recognized for innovative and creative contributions to the rapidly developing science of electrical construction.

Today's accepted practices must be modified and expanded. We cannot keep shop in the same old way if survival is our goal. Our future Fellows will come from those whose minds accept and believe in progress brought on in the midst of change.

One of the changes that will be more and more significant is the fact that we will not have such a limited field of competition.

The automobile industry went along for years with one American competing against another American. The result is history.

Labor and management have said this is "our" work! The Academy Fellow will be one of those who answers the question "Who said so"?

How will he do it? The United States' ability to compete in the world market is being challenged. Our technical assistance programs to developing nations will bring to the world markets prefabricated construction and building components.

Foreign business groups are buying American properties and business enterprise. They conduct business from a different background.

There is no reason to believe that a great deal of our construction will not be accomplished by industrial teams to the exclusion of building trade unions.

The future Academy Fellow will be one of those who faces this threat and applied American ingenuity to preserve our way of life which includes a high standard of living.

Many of our future Fellows will be recipients of the Coggeshall Award because of their work in the application of computers to electrical construction. Job management, inventory control, cost accounting, job progress, manpower pools, and productivity are well within today's sophisticated hardware. Simplification and lowering of costs will bring the computer into the contractor's office in increasing numbers.

The computer may very well ask the question, "What have you done lately"?

The Comstock Award will be presented to a NECA member because he assisted in putting the entire construction craftsman membership of IBEW on computers to assist management in its effort to "man" jobs. Special know-how and past experience of each member would be immediately available. Updating for residence and availability would, of course, be a constant use. Temporary workers and tenure could be under constant surveillance. Upgrading of the craftsman could be noted. In time of a national emergency, this would be a very valuable tool.

Contractors will receive the McGraw Award presented "to the person from the electrical contracting industry who is adjudged to have made a contribution to the industry of some new and useful idea or have performed an industry service over and above his normal responsibilities to his own or his own company's progress."

NECA will face some momentous decisions in the years to come. The then - current officers and Board of Governors will have at their disposal a brain trust, the Fellows of The Academy of Electrical Contracting of the National Electrical Contractors Association, to assist them.

The Academy must stand ready to advise and support our industry and our government when called upon for opinions.

NECA has said by its actions in forming the Academy, "You are not forgotten, you are needed and respected. We want you to be an important part of NECA forever. Bolster us where you can, counsel us when we are frustrated, and lift us up with your prayers."

