

# The First Twenty-Five Years

*This article is an edited version of a three part history printed twenty-five years ago.*

As the International Right of Way Association enters its 50th year, a look back at our roots seems appropriate.

The founder of the Southern California Right of Way Agents' Association was Frank Balfour. Balfour discovered soon after he was hired by the California Division of Highways as a right of way agent in 1931, that the majority of right of way men working for government agencies held their positions through political patronage or were junior engineers working right of way part-time. Within private companies many of the agents were "engineers" who didn't make it, but found their niche by skill, luck, or favor in the company's right of way department.

Frank Balfour thought right of way work could be upgraded into a profession. He spent many long hours of discussion with Spencer V. Cortelyou, District Engineer in charge of the Los Angeles office of the California Division of Highways. What could be done to improve right of way and land acquisition techniques, procedures, and status of right of way employees? Cortelyou encouraged Balfour to take "the bull by the horns" and do something to

bring right of way workers together for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Fourteen men met October 16, 1934 to organize an association. One additional meeting was held. On December 6, 1934, Frank Balfour was elected First President of what is today the International Right of Way Association.

In its first year of operation, the Association instituted policies that exist today. The first issue of Right of Way News, a four page monthly newsletter, was published March 20, 1935. This was the forerunner of RIGHT OF WAY magazine. A major education effort was initiated that included monthly meetings, a six-month extension course in condemnation appraisal procedures that met once a week, and the Chapter sponsored a right of way and land acquisition program for the 7th Annual Institute on Government. Flush with success, the Association changed its name to American Right of Way Association to reflect the hopes and aspirations of a national organization.

The Association continued to grow in its second year. In 1936, the official emblem, the R/W shield was designed. The proceedings from the 8th Institute on Government were

printed by the Association. Additionally, a second extension course on land titles was offered. Eighty-three attended the twelve-week course.

With membership growing to 190 by October 1936, the Executive Board put a constitutional limit of 200 members that could belong to the Association. In January 1937, a committee for national expansion was established. (The limit was repealed.) One action taken was to mail the 1938 edition of Right of Way Procedure and Land Acquisition, published by the Association, to every state highway right of way department. San Francisco Chapter 2 was chartered on April 18, 1939.

The policy of expansion was one of soft-sell. A chapter would be chartered only if the local agents wanted to organize a chapter within the Association umbrella. It would be up to the other agencies and industries to investigate what the Association meant to Los Angeles and San Francisco to be able to decide whether forming a local entity would help them.

In 1941, a Code of Ethics was written by a committee chaired by Harold Throckmorton. It was another forty-one years until the Association developed a mission statement.

Five years later, on April 5, 1946, the Association was incorporated as a non-profit educational organization. On December 18, 1946, the first Board of Directors meeting was held.

The formation of the Oregon and Seattle chapters were a direct result of both J.M. Devers, Chief Counsel for the Oregon State Highway Commission and Frank Stocking, Chief Right of Way Agent for the Washington State Department of Highways attending seminars sponsored by Chapter 1 and 2. They saw the Association working and went home



California Division of Highways - Los Angeles Staff 1934.

to organize chapters. Oregon Chapter 3 was chartered October 27, 1950 and Seattle Chapter 4 was chartered on February 6, 1952. In between, the Board of Directors had met, with a final treasurer's report stating that the Association had no liabilities with a plus balance of \$140.22. Disbursements for the year totaled \$142.60.

In the early fifties, extension courses and one-day seminars still proved popular. Also, the Case of the Month was instituted by Chapter 1 luncheon meeting and has remained a feature since.

In October 1952, the first intercity chapter meeting took place involving all four chapters. This showed that the Association was not a local organization and that increased educational benefits do accrue the broader the spectrum of participants.

Soon thereafter, Heart of America Chapter 5, Kansas City, Kansas was chartered. And with its formation one of the lovable right of way characters, "Rip" Flanagan makes his appearance as President.

At the Annual meeting in 1953, three major rules were developed. They were expulsion of members for cause, termination of membership, and the formation of club affiliates.

Also during the summer of 1953, the California Supreme Court passed a decision on the famous California condemnation case, *People vs. Ricciardi*. This decision established new concepts and many requirements, both in the valuation of right of way to be acquired, the legal procedure involved in determining fair market value and what constitutes damage.



Frank Balfour presenting charter to Rip Flanagan at Chapter 5 chartering.

At the close of 1953, the newsletter published by Chapter 1 for the last twenty years for all members ceased publication. RIGHT OF WAY magazine was born, published by the national association. Right of Way news's last big story was the announced chartering of Mile High Chapter 6, Denver, Colorado, for the following spring.

Chapter 6 and Michigan Chapter 7 were chartered March 6 and 9, 1954 respectively. Richard Taylor, after attending a Chapter 5 meeting, was bound and determined to form a chapter in Michigan. He succeeded in his efforts and went on to become Atlantic Coast Area Regional Chairman, National Chairman, and National Liaison Committee Chairman.

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